PUNISHER™

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

MIKE BARON
TALK WITH A YOUNG TURK

"WAR JOURNALIST"
CARL POTTS
TAKES A FEW SHOTS

DARK HORSE ARTIST
CHRIS WARNER
TAKES ON THE BIG GUNS

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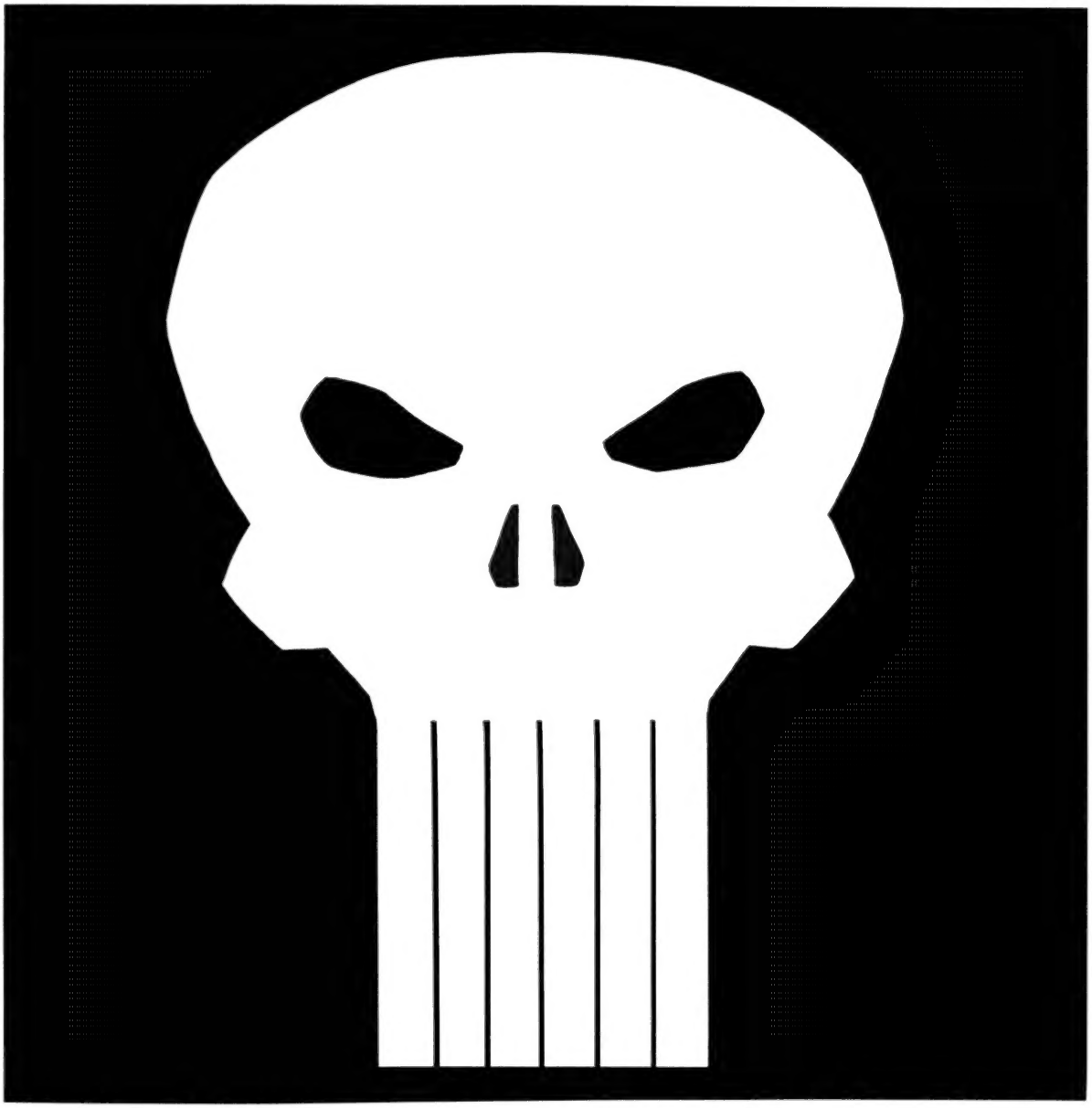

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SOUTHERN KNIGHTS T.M.

#1 SUPER TEAM OF THE SOUTH!

CREDITS

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT
editor/publisher

conceived by:
JIM SALICRUP
editorial and design consultant

DARREL BOATZ
associate editor

MARK BORAX
ANDY MANGELS
DWIGHT ZIMMERMAN
contributing editors

M KAY McGONNELL
operations manager

JUDY O'NEIL
modern maven

D HAMBONE
art & tone director

JANET BALSAM
TAMMY BROWN
CAROL KALISH
PEGGY MAY
ED O'NEAL
DON PENDLETON
STEVE RUDE
special thanks

O G WOTTAWAG
whale of a tail

MARTIN W HERZOG
canadian correspondent

J R MATHER
international marketing director

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cover contributed by:
MARVEL BULLPEN
art & colors

UP FRONT

Safety. It's a word you hear bandied about quite a bit these days. The reasons are fairly obvious — people want to feel safe in their home, on the job, in their city. And this pursuit of safety has led to some interesting developments . . .

For instance, I'm sure most all of us have seen the advertisements proclaiming that, in the United States, ten thousand people are killed each year with handguns. (Semantic note — I do not use the phrase "by handguns," as the ads do, because a handgun is incapable of killing on its own. Even accidental deaths involve a person mishandling the gun.) The people who run these ads are pushing for strict control of guns to stop these deaths from occurring — they are trying to legislate safety for themselves.

(This is not a gun control editorial, so I won't point out that criminals who want to own guns are not particularly likely to be deterred by a law against owning guns — they're called criminals for a reason, you know.)

But let's take the position of the gun control proponents to a logical extreme. If it's bad that ten thousand people are killed with guns each year, isn't it worse that fifty thousand are killed with cars? That's five times as many people dying, so the car problem should be considered five times worse, right? Why aren't people who are so concerned with saving human life trying have car control laws passed?

Another example concerns drugs, which can be addicting, and even a cause of death. Drug abuse can harm anyone — regardless of social status — so, since the drug problem has risen to affect those above the poverty level, more and more people have been pushing for stronger laws against the use, sale, and importation of drugs.

Once again we see an attempt to legislate safety into our world. And once again I'm going to carry it to a logical extreme.

Alcohol is a drug. For some, it is addictive and its misuse can kill people (particularly when coupled with that killing machine, the car). Yet we see few attempting to have alcohol outlawed. Of course, it was tried once and it didn't turn out to be a very successful law. Sort of like the drug laws we've got in effect right now . . .

What's my point? It's simply that — FREEDOM IS NOT SAFE.

It never has been and it never will. It's impossible to pass laws to protect people from everything that might possibly hurt them — nor are those laws particularly successful.

To paraphrase Ben Franklin, anyone who gives up liberty in exchange for safety deserves neither liberty nor safety.

Personally, I'll take liberty any day.

Henry

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"He sees nothing wrong in stealing

MIKE BARON

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *Mike, the Punisher had a very successful limited series and then you were asked to come on to write the ongoing series. How did that make you feel?*
MIKE BARON: Good.
DWIGHT: (Pause.) *Could you elaborate, please?*
MIKE: Well, it's always nice to be wanted. *(Laughter.)*
DWIGHT: *Basically when Carl Potts was talking with you, what qualities did he see in your writing that told him you were the guy he wanted writing THE PUNISHER?*
MIKE: I can't say, you'd have to ask Carl. I'm not trying to be evasive but I try not to analyze my own work.

DWIGHT: *Well, there must have been something that he told you?*
MIKE: He cited THE BADGER, which he's been reading regularly. I *think* that was the main reason, that he felt that because of THE BADGER I could write THE PUNISHER.
DWIGHT: *What angle of THE BADGER do you think struck the responsive chord?*
MIKE: I think that the *main* relationship was the fact that they would both arbitrarily choose causes where they saw an imbalance of justice and set out to make it right. There's many differences. In THE BADGER, of course, there's a strain of absurdity and black humor and *wildness*, it's kind of **Sam Peckinpah** meets **Chuck Jones.** THE PUNISHER is for me a much more serious strip with a much more coherent outlook and mood.
DWIGHT: *I've heard that you're basing the Punisher's adventures on real life experiences.*
MIKE: Not of *mine!* Many of the adventures are inspired by history, contemporary crimes, what's going on right around us. I think most writers take inspiration from daily life and from news events. I try not to be *too* trendy, but on the other hand I feel that if you have a really interesting *crime* then you have the basis for a good story, and if you have an interesting *criminal* you have a good story. Just show me a good crime and I think I

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mike Baron

Born: 1 July 1949 — Madison, WI — forward gifts care 'of First. *(Laughter.)*

Occupation: Writer

Year Got Into Comics Professionally: '82 I think

Influences: I can only legitimately name two, Carl Barks and Philip Jose Farmer. I'm sure I have thousands but those are the only ones who I have consciously applied in my writing

Most Favorite Rejected PUNISHER Scene: The story begins with the Punisher deciding to knock off the Attorney General. *(Laughter.)* The story flew and I'm glad it did, but at the end of the book when he decides to knock off the President, Carl said *No! (Laughter.)* It showed how crazy he was, but instead we have a scene of contrition. And Carl was absolutely right from his point of view, I didn't quarrel with him, he's an excellent editor

Superhero Would Love To Write: I can't imagine beginning to equal the satisfaction I get from writing NEXUS and BADGER, but of all the other characters I might choose the Punisher would be very near the top of the list, and he's not really a superhero but he's certainly a character that attracts me

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money from crooks. Neither do I."

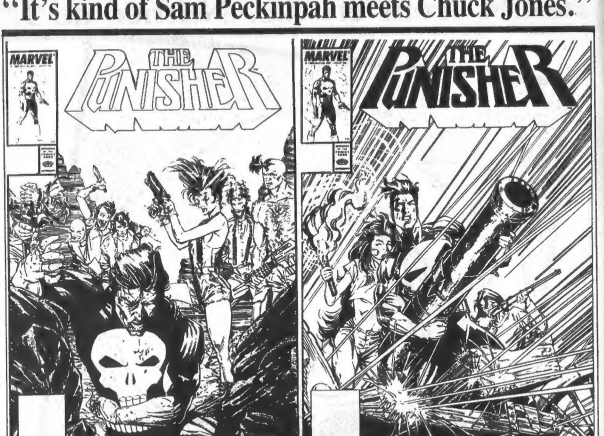
Illustration by Steve "THE DUDE" Rude.

can turn it into a PUNISHER story.

DWIGHT: *Is that the reason why superheroes and super-villains per se have been so absent from the book?*

MIKE: No, not really. The main reason is that to me the Punisher is a very realistic character, possibly the *most* realistic character that Marvel is publishing right now. He's a character who I try to place in real life situations without straining the reader's credulity. I'm going for a very specific *film noire* feeling here, a very cynical downbeat rooted in reality.

"It's kind of Sam Peckinpah meets Chuck Jones."



Because of that I don't think superheroes really lend themselves to the strip. I think that THE PUNISHER has so much to deal with with the texture of crime in America today, with the reality of that, that it's superfluous to drag in a superhero to make it interesting. You don't need that, life itself is interesting enough.

Of course we're restructuring for dramatic effect, but to me the Punisher is *fascinating* just working in the milieu that he is; and I'm *trying* to place him in realistic criminal milieus, and I *have* to rely on contemporary reports for things like that. For instance there's a book called THE TRADE which I use, which is investigative reporting into the international drug cartel that charts the flow of drugs, opium, heroin, cocaine, from wherever to how it gets into the country.. And so much of this is coming out in the news today, especially with the revelations about **General Noriega** and whatever involvement he may have had in the C.I.A., that it *begs* to be adapted into story material. It *begs* it. And people are doing it right and left, like the film ABOVE THE LAW which I think does it very well.

But to me THE PUNISHER is realistic, there's no need for superheroes. That *doesn't* mean that we don't have other characters from the Marvel Universe, for instance we're doing a four-issue war with the Kingpin, and of course we had that crossover with DAREDEVIL. But for those who absolutely *have* to have their Punisher with mutants, they should read PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL. *(Laughier.)*

DWIGHT: *Do you think the Punisher's actions strike a responsive chord in the audience, that since our legal system seems to be so helpless against —*

MIKE: Absolutely, absolutely. I think that's *the* main appeal of THE PUNISHER, the fact that the average citizen feels that the criminal justice system doesn't really *work* for people who obey the law. It just doesn't seem to work for that, it doesn't work for straight shooters. It works for the people who *abuse* the law, who use every loophole to delay justice, to get what they want; especially it works for criminals, who *aren't* like ordinary citizens, who aren't concerned about, "I don't want to lose my standing in the community, I don't want to lose everything I have, I won't turn to crime or even mess around." A criminal doesn't have those concerns. So it seems like life isn't fair, it's balanced in favor of the criminal, and the reason is he doesn't give a *shit!*

I think that the vast majority of Americans are *outraged* at the way criminals slip through the justice system. They're outraged at the inability of this country to impose death sentences and carry them out. So I think they find a release in things like THE PUNISHER, Clint Eastwood's DIRTY HARRY films, and Sly Stallone. I don't wish to identify myself with the politics of *either* of those guys or the characters they portray, particularly not Sly, although if you look there's a tremendous amount that they and the Punisher have in common. What these characters are addressing is the average citizen's outrage at the *failure* of society to punish evil.

DWIGHT: *Is it possible that instead of addressing it it more reinforces their perception?*

MIKE: That's something I hope to portray

"Patronizing a hooker, they wouldn't let that pass."

in the book. I've been showing the Punisher getting increasingly crazy and ... I've had story ideas shot down from Marvel right and left, you can ask Carl. My version of the Punisher is too *intense* for Marvel, they keep planing off the rough spots. But that's fine, I think that what comes through *works*, that it's intense enough. But ... what were you asking about, I lost my train of thought.

DWIGHT: *Rather than reflecting society's —*

MIKE: Oh, yeah, am I reinforcing? Well, I don't really care about that, my #1 goal is to entertain. That's the most important thing, if I don't do that then I haven't done my job. These stories are simply stories that I choose because the character demands them. I'm not saying that I personally don't get behind him on some of his missions, or that I don't enjoy the same vicarious thrill that the readers do when they see the Punisher blowing bad guys away, but I'm not *advocating* that, I'm trying to entertain. This is simply the way I see the character going. But I do believe that the criminal justice system in this country is *fucked* and needs a great deal of reform! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *What's the psychological cost to the Punisher for doing all the things he does?*

MIKE: I have *tried* to structure him as an existential hero. We see some of his thoughts in the War Journal that he keeps, but he deliberately closes off the *bulk* of his emotions. He has such a tight rein on them, I see him as a control freak and an obsessive compulsive. So what we know about his personality are things we have to divine from external hints. I don't *ever* want to go into his head and show what he's really thinking, I think that would be a mistake with this character more than any other; in the sense that, "I'm scared ... it takes me back when I was 19 ... hiding in the jungle ... I'm really scared." No, none of that, it's no good. You have to guess what he's thinking by the way he acts and the *few* thoughts he lets slip in the War Journal.

DWIGHT: *What do you have planned for stories in the future?*

MIKE: I have a number of exciting storylines, one of them is going to be about corruption in contemporary boxing. Of course the Punisher is too old to be a serious contender, but he could go into a gym and be a punching bag for some of these guys coming up; and so he gets involved with a young boxer who has a tremendous future and learns to his *horror*

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Everybody's favorite weather man (pencils by Reinhold).

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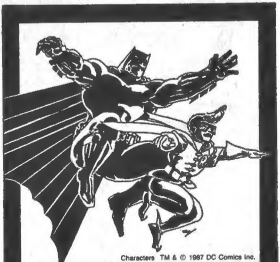

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"I've had story ideas shot down from Marvel right & left."

that he's expected to throw a fight! And then I have another story which is going to deal with product liability, and it's going to be more with white collar type criminals. But the sky's the limit.

To me the temptation is to go ahead and do this huge gang war that's going on in L.A. that's outlined in the movie COLORS, which I haven't seen yet. I feel that there's such an amount of gravity *drawing* me towards that story that I have to fight it off. I don't want to deal with that, there's too many guys fighting the cocaine trade in comic books as is, and the Punisher has done more than his fair share. So I'm trying to avoid the obvious. I'm looking around for unusual contemporary crimes that *affect* people where he can go after the bad guys. Those are two that I have lined up, but I'm open to suggestions.

DWIGHT: *How about child abuse, is the Punisher going to get involved in that?*

MIKE: Uh . . . I hadn't thought about it. I *don't* want this to become the "issue of the month," it never will. Not that that's not a serious crime, but it's one of those *juicy* moral issues that other comics have *pounced* upon so that it squishes and squeaks fairly loudly, and I would just as soon stay away from that type of thing. I want to veer off in less obvious directions. But if people are interested in good fiction dealing with child abuse, there's a book called STREGA by **Andrew Vachss,** who's a lawyer in New York dealing with child abuse case. It's good hard-boiled fiction, just a little ancillary plug there. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Punisher has been running primarily as a solo character, with his equipment and everything. Where does he get his money?*

MIKE: He rips it off from the crooks. I've shown him invading their strongboxes a couple of times, he just takes the cash lying around, and since he busts the big guys he *frequently* comes across piles of cash in excess of $100,000.

DWIGHT: *And this doesn't create a problem for him?*

MIKE: He's not *big* on moral dilemmas, Dwight. This guy's pretty well decided what's going on, so no, he sees nothing wrong in stealing money from crooks. Neither do I.

DWIGHT: *Do you want to do a PUNISHER story in graphic novel format where you'd be free from the restrictions* —

MIKE: That's funny, we're *doing* a graphic novel. It's completely written and it's got some very strong stuff in it, but there's nothing in there that would cross a Marvel taboo. I'm *quite* certain that if I did cross a Marvel taboo they would shoot it down, graphic novel or not. For example I think that if I were to show the Badger patronizing a hooker in a graphic novel, they wouldn't let that pass. Now I *could* be wrong, and if they let me do another graphic novel I'll throw that in and see if it flies.

DWIGHT: *Excuse me, you said the Badger.*

MIKE: The Badger, I meant the Punisher. Excuse *me*, the characters are fighting for control of my brain! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *That's a rather droll thought considering what Badger is.*

MIKE: Right. *(Laughter.)* But getting back to the Punisher, I don't think they'd let me use the word "motherfucker" whether it's a graphic novel or not. I don't *need* to go to extremes to tell the story, but . . . well, we'll see.

DWIGHT: *What's the PUNISHER graphic novel about? Who is the artist?*

MIKE: Bill Reinhold, and it's *great*. I really got to stretch out here, it has some strong stuff in it. It's called THE INTRUDER and it's basically about a secret government hit organization trying to bust drug criminals and they invade the *wrong* house and end up killing some innocent people. *That's* where the story begins, and Punisher observes this. He's on the trail of the same smuggler the hit organization is after. I'm very excited about that book, and if you want to know

BADGER pencils by Bill Reinhold (First Comics).

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"To me the Punisher is possibly the most realistic

what it looks like just check out HEX-BREAKER, the BADGER graphic novel which is on sale now. Bill did the art in that, it absolutely *stunning*.

DWIGHT: *Would you like to do a PUNISHER text novel?*

MIKE: Oh, no, I think **Don Pendleton** has done plenty of those. *(Laughter.)* And they're called THE EXECUTIONER and let's not forget that for all intents and purposes the Punisher *is* the Executioner. I mean that seems fairly obvious to me. **Gerry Conway** created the Punisher, but before that there were many EXECUTIONER novels, several of which I've read, and he was simply a character whose time has come.

DWIGHT: *What sort of reading, beyond picking up real life crime incidents, do you use as springboards for your stories?*

MIKE: Well, I subscribe to INTERNATIONAL COMBAT ARMS and I pick up investigative crime books such as THE FIX or THE YAKUZA, and a lot of true crime studies, books about true crime, and technical manuals. I'm thinking of subscribing to ASSAULT WEAPONS, but I think that might be a little excessive. I mean I don't need to read about the latest hardware every month, I get enough of that in INTERNATIONAL COMBAT ARMS. But the hardware is important to us, we try to make it right.

DWIGHT: *Considering the kind of person, physically active, etc., that Punisher is, is Mike Baron someone himself who goes out on these survivalist type games?*

MIKE: No, not me, but Carl does. I'm pretty active but I don't do any of that survivalist stuff. Every now and then I go out to a friend's house in the country and pop off a few rounds and ask him about the guns, try and pick up a little knowledge there, but I don't do anything with the war games. Carl does that. Did he talk to you about that?

DWIGHT: *Yes, he did. And we got into the kind of people he's met there, some of whom get kind of intense about it.*

MIKE: Well, I know all *sorts* of lunatics including two survivalist types — but no organized activity! *(Laughter.)* No thanks.

DWIGHT: *Has Mike Baron ever been mugged or anything?*

MIKE: No, I never have, although some people have tried.

DWIGHT: *Oh? Could you explain, please?*

MIKE: I'd just as soon not go into that. Let's just say that I've trained in martial arts for many years and that when push came to shove it worked for me. But I'm not a bad dude, I don't go looking for trouble, and I have been scared *shitless* many times in the past. But it's *good* to

Here, and the next page , pencil work from NEXUS, the early years (by Steve Rude).

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character Marvel is publishing right now."

GENTLEMEN AND I'M A CHEESE EATING REMEMBER THAT WORD-EREL CLOWNING IS WHEN THE SHOW...
STOP DEAD ALONG SOLO
MUMMATER IS A FAMOUS PERSONALITY...
CHILI PEPPER!
WE REGRET THAT CLOWSOME MUST SPLIT DUE HIS HELL BEING
WHAT THE HELL IS THIS
A BLACK HOLE?
A DRUNK UNCLE WITH AND LOST IT SPINNING THE WRONG WAY
DUH! NOT THIS AGAIN I GOT TO GET A CLOWN LOVIN' THIS IS A STEAM IT COMES OF LIKE A KNIFE WHICH
THINK OF MAYBE WHO HAVE?

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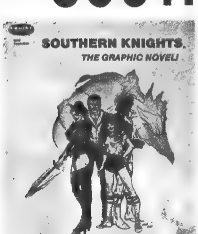

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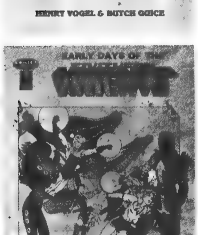

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"Life isn't fair, it's balanced in favor of the criminal."

feel that you have some control over your destiny, and that's what situations like that can do for you. On the other hand they can get you hurt. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Mike, is a fundamental message within THE PUNISHER, like it or not, that crime is paying and the only way to combat it is to become —*

MIKE: No, I don't think that is the fundamental message. I think that the fundamental message is that there is real evil in this world and it forces people to make hard choices, and *intelligent* people realize that evil *has* to be removed, and sometimes the civilized methods don't work.

DWIGHT: (Pause.) *You were going to say something else?*

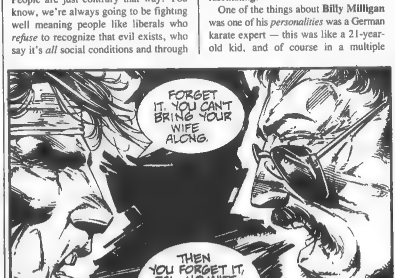
MIKE: No, no, in fact I think I said too much. That's rather a lengthy message for a book, and I *don't* want it to be a message book per se. But that's the way the Punisher feels, so in a way that's the operating philosophy behind the book.

But there is real evil, there is such a thing as human evil, it's not all social conditions, and the sooner we wake up to this the better off we'll be. But that's the *frustrating* thing about human nature, is that no matter how good or how obvious something seems to you or me, there's 30% of the population out there that are *always* going to disagree with it and you're going to fight every step of the way. People are just contrary that way. You know, we're always going to be fighting well meaning people like liberals who *refuse* to recognize that evil exists, who say it's *all* social conditions and through study and understanding and vast amounts of money it can be dealt with. Well, that's not true. I think that criminals are here to stay, that's a part of human nature as well.

DWIGHT: *Well, let's talk about some of your other projects, for instance BADGER. He's a rather unique character in the realm of comics. How did he come about?*

MIKE: Oh, God, that's about the 200th time I've told this story — but there's always fresh people out there! I was trying to sell a second book to Capital and they said, "Okay, what d'you got?" I said, "I got a Druid weather wizard here." And Milton said, "No, we're *not* doing any comic about weather wizards, give us a costumed superhero!" So I said, "Jesus Christ, why would anyone put on a costume and fight crime? They'd have to be crazy!" *Boing!* — a light went off over my head. So that's where the basic idea came from. Then, just because I was out here stewing in *broth* juice or whatever in Wisconsin, all these other pieces started to fall into place; such as there's a mental health hospital here that's one of the best in the nation, deals with all sorts of personality disorders — although I don't know if they were dealing with any multiple personality disorders — *plus* I'd been reading a book about multiple personalities, THE MINDS OF BILLY MILLIGAN by **Daniel Keyes.** It was fascinating.

One of the things about **Billy Milligan** was one of his *personalities* was a German karate expert — this was like a 21-year-old kid, and of course in a multiple



"Why would anyone put on a costume and fight crime?"

YOU GET US OUT OF HERE AND SATAN WILL REWARD YOU. YES HE WILL. YOU PLAY CHESS, DON'T YOU ERNIE?
SNAP
SNAP
SNAP

"These sweet little girls are the most vicious killers."

Sonic Disruptors © 1988 DC Comics, Inc.

of it, but some.

DWIGHT: *Do you find that comics are a limiting medium?*

MIKE: No, not really. The only thing that limits me are *publishing* guidelines and *editorial* guidelines. Some people won't let me do things, but that's 'their prerogative, particularly when I'm working with *their* characters. But sometimes I can't even do things with my own characters because it's not *deemed* commercial. Well, I'm not in this business for my health, I want to make a decent living, so I am *aware* of the demands of commercialism; but I'm also aware of the need to please myself. I please myself for the most part, I think most good writers do. Most writers write for themselves.

DWIGHT: *What are your opinions of the comic-book awards, the CBG Awards and the things that are taking the place of the Kirby Awards now that that's over?*

MIKE: I think that the people who receive the awards are all worthy people, and if anybody wants to give an award good for them, I salute them for it.

DWIGHT: *But don't you think that things tend to be skewed towards the books with the higher circulation figures?*

MIKE: Yeah, I could bitch about that, but what's the point. To see my works come out as I intended them is the greatest reward of all. But the awards . . . I mean I would choose differently, *obviously*, from some of these awards — well, maybe not obviously. *(Laughter.)* But I would, I would choose differently for many of these awards, and I might even give some awards to myself — but any writer who doesn't believe that shouldn't be writing, it takes a big ego to write. But for the most part I think awards are good for the industry as long as they are run in a forthright and fair manner. You know, the fact that a book like NEXUS for instance — oh, let us just choose NEXUS out of the thin blue air — which has a circulation of 30,000, never wins a major award, whereas a book like X-MEN, which has a circulation of 400,000, does win awards, that doesn't surprise me. But X-MEN is still a good book.

DWIGHT: *If Mike Baron were to give hopeful writers who wanted to break into comics any advice, what would it be?*

MIKE: You all better be writing every day whether you've got a place to stick it or not. If they're not writing every day they're not serious about being writers. I don't mean literally seven days a week, but I do literally mean four to six days a week. And the second most important piece of advice I could give anybody would be to write for money, do it anywhere you can, because that will make you a better writer. And that doesn't necessarily mean comics. The trouble with all of these guys wanting to break into comics is comics is still a very small field and *can't* absorb them all, particularly not people who are training themselves specifically to *write* comics. It's kind of a Zen frustration but that's not the way to learn how to write. They should learn to write *anything* for money, for anybody; reporting, interviews like you're doing. You do stories, too, don't you?

BOYS AND GIRLS, EATS AND ACTIONS. EAT YOUR BOOKS AND CHEW YOUR WAY THROUGH THE BIBLE. BE SURE TO TRY THIS AND THAT WITH THE WORLD AT IT'S KNEES
JOLLY ROGER: WHO'S HAPPINESS?
MINE NEVER BLOOMED
LIST OF DISAPPEARANCES IS ON YOUR DOORSTEP. THIS HOUSE SAYING 'AH' IS ALMOST OVER TEN MINS. SIGH
FOUR-SWIM SHAKIN LOOSE THAT TEETH-RATTLES AND BRAIN-SHAKES AND BATTLE-BORING COMIN' AT YOU LIVE FROM THE FOUR SEASONS HOTEL IN OKLAHOMA CITY TONIGHT
HIGH ABOVE OKLAHOMA CITY! WHERE THE RULES ARE THERE ARE NO RULES SOME MIGHTY MUSIC COMIN' UP
STONES, BEATLES, APPLIANCES, DAN RANGO AND THE ALL-STAR LINEUP INCLUDING A HOT NEW SINGLE BY AFTUNNAMATRON ROCKER PRINCE
BUT YOU GOTTA GO THROUGH IT TO GET TO THE FUTURE. WE PRESUMED YOU, DEAR, I WANT TO READ YOU THE NAMES OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE DISAPPEARED WITHIN THE LAST FIVE MINUTES OF THE WHOLESALE MURDER THAT THE FASCIST MILITARY DICTATORSHIP'S IN WASHINGTON.

Mike Baron's 12-issue Deluxe Format maxi-series from DC Comics SONIC DISRUPTORS.

DWIGHT: *Oh, yeah. I've worked for Marvel and knocked around.*

MIKE: I know I've read some of your stories.

DWIGHT: *Well, thank you.*

MIKE: Well, it's not a compliment. I can't remember 'em. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Oh, well.*

MIKE: Yeah, I know I've seen your name around, I wish I could think of something you did — but I'll be looking for it. But see, you're doing all this stuff.

DWIGHT: *Well, the thing there is you get anything and everything because one way or another it's practice, and if you get paid for it so much the better.*

MIKE: Yeah, that's right. The trick is to learn how to get paid for your practice. What are *you* doing, what do you

"They're kung fu comics, filled with endless & wildly

have coming up? Do you work up in the Marvel offices?

DWIGHT: *Yeah, I'm the managing editor of MARVEL AGE magazine.*

MIKE: That's right, *that's* where I see your byline all of the time.

DWIGHT: *That's where most people would know me. We can delete all of this, we are supposed to be talking about Mike Baron after all —*

MIKE: Well, hell, plug your own books! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Well, I've got a three-issue thing called THE LAST SUPERHERO that Comics Interview is publishing.*

MIKE: Yeah. I heard about that. Who's the artist?

DWIGHT: *Willie Peppers, he's really good.*

MIKE: Yeah. I've seen his stuff, very good.

DWIGHT: *Yeah, I'm excited about that project. Now I have to finish it.* (Laughter.) *In fact I'm going back to that as soon as we're done with the interview. I've got some stories coming up in SOLO AVENGERS and MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS. but, well, THE LAST SUPERHERO is the one I'm really excited about. It takes the idea of what would happen if all of the superheroes but one were gone, and this one happens to be the first one. It also gets into the idea of . . . well, for instance, when SUPERMAN came out in our world and took the publishing business by storm, in comics every company that could immediately started coming out with superheroes, it made good business sense. Well, if you put it in the comic-book world isn't it kind of strange that one guy shows up and within a couple of years they're coming out of the woodwork?*

ORTIZ DON'T MIND. HE'S GOT A LITTLE PROBLEM HE DIDN'T TELL YOU ABOUT...
I DON'T KNOW AND I DON'T CARE.
WHAT'S THE MATTER? YOU GOT A LITTLE PROBLEM, TOO?

MIKE: Yeah.

DWIGHT: *This story explains what happened and why, and all of the consequences thereof. And it was a lot of fun getting into this whole big thematic thing of what a superhero actually means, and the kind of commitment that he has to have, and the sacrifice that has to be made.*

MIKE: Well, we'll be looking forward to that.

DWIGHT: *Thank you.* (Laughter) *Let's see, is there anything that you'd like to talk about that we haven't covered?*

MIKE: Well, I've got this Jademan stuff coming up.

DWIGHT: *What's that?*

Ever the freelancer, Mike Baron edits a NEW series from JADEMAN COMICS (painting by Tony Wong).

1988 Jademan Comics

imaginative fight sequences — imaginary kung fu."

MIKE: From Hong Kong, Chinese kung fu comics. I think THE JADEMAN SPECIAL is out already; all I want to say is don't judge the series by the special, which is very good but it gives no indication of the *true* flavor of these stories. You should *definitely* check out all of these four titles that are coming out: ORIENTAL HEROES; THE BLOOD SWORD; THE FORCE OF BUDDHA'S PALM; and DRUNKEN FIST The latter two are being scripted by **Roger Salick.** Roger's doing a couple of the CROSSROADS books for First, he does HAWKMOON, and he does BADGER and JUDAH backup stories. He's an excellent writer. Of course we're just doing the English scripts for this material, but the material is *outrageously* inventive visually. You have no idea. I *pray* that they are able to preserve the full flavor of these kung fu comics. And I'm sure they will because **Tony Wong** is just a multimillionaire. He owns his own printing press, the thing's the size of a city block, and he's willing to retool at the drop of a hat and make it better. He trashed a whole first shipment of THE JADEMAN SPECIAL because of a few typos. We're talking 100,000 books and he did it all over, so I'm pretty sure the printing is going to be real spiffy.

DWIGHT: *That's rather unusual.*

MIKE: It's *real* unusual. I was in Hong Kong for a week recently working on the books with **Tony Wong** and Jademan, so what emerges will be most interesting.

DWIGHT: *Who is distributing it over here?*

MIKE: Everybody. Diamond, Capital —

DWIGHT: *But it's not coming out through Marvel or —*

MIKE: No, no, it's Jademan Comics. You haven't heard about these?

DWIGHT: *No, I'm afraid I haven't, but that's not unusual, I've been kind of wrapped up with some stuff.*

MIKE: Right, right, trench syndrome.

DWIGHT: *Right, you get in the trenches and you lose sight of all this other stuff. Tell me more about this, it sounds really good.*

MIKE: Well, these guys are lunatics over there, they do the books *weekly!* They're kung fu comics, they are *filled* with *endless* and *wildly imaginative* fight sequences — in fact the bulk of these books are kung fu fight sequences — and depending on the book there are references to real kung fu or imaginary kung fu. Two of them are costume dramas, historical period pieces that take place in the 16th century or so, and two of them are contemporary. These books sell like 2.5 million copies each in **Hong Kong**, everybody reads them — 40% of the population of Hong Kong reads Tony's books! I saw people buying them off the stands all of the time, I wish we had that readership *here!* But it's a different culture over there, and it's a different type of entertainment.

DWIGHT: *It also doesn't carry the stigma, I take it.*

MIKE: I don't know, I don't know what the stigma is — the stigma I think is evaporating here, the trick is to replace it with readers. *(Laughter.)* You know, this bit about the comic reader, I hear less and less of that. I suppose it's still around, but in my opinion comics have made more progress in the last two years than in the previous 40. They are routinely treated in the press now with respect, and I mean the straight press, and that's good. And the new readers are trickling in, that's even better. But not fast enough to suit me.

DWIGHT: *Exactly.*

MIKE: And I should mention the four-issue GINGER FOX mini-series coming out this fall from Comico, that I wrote and the **Pander Brothers** illustrated If you ever wanted to see comics that **Pablo Picasso** had drawn, I think you should check these out. *(Laughter.)*

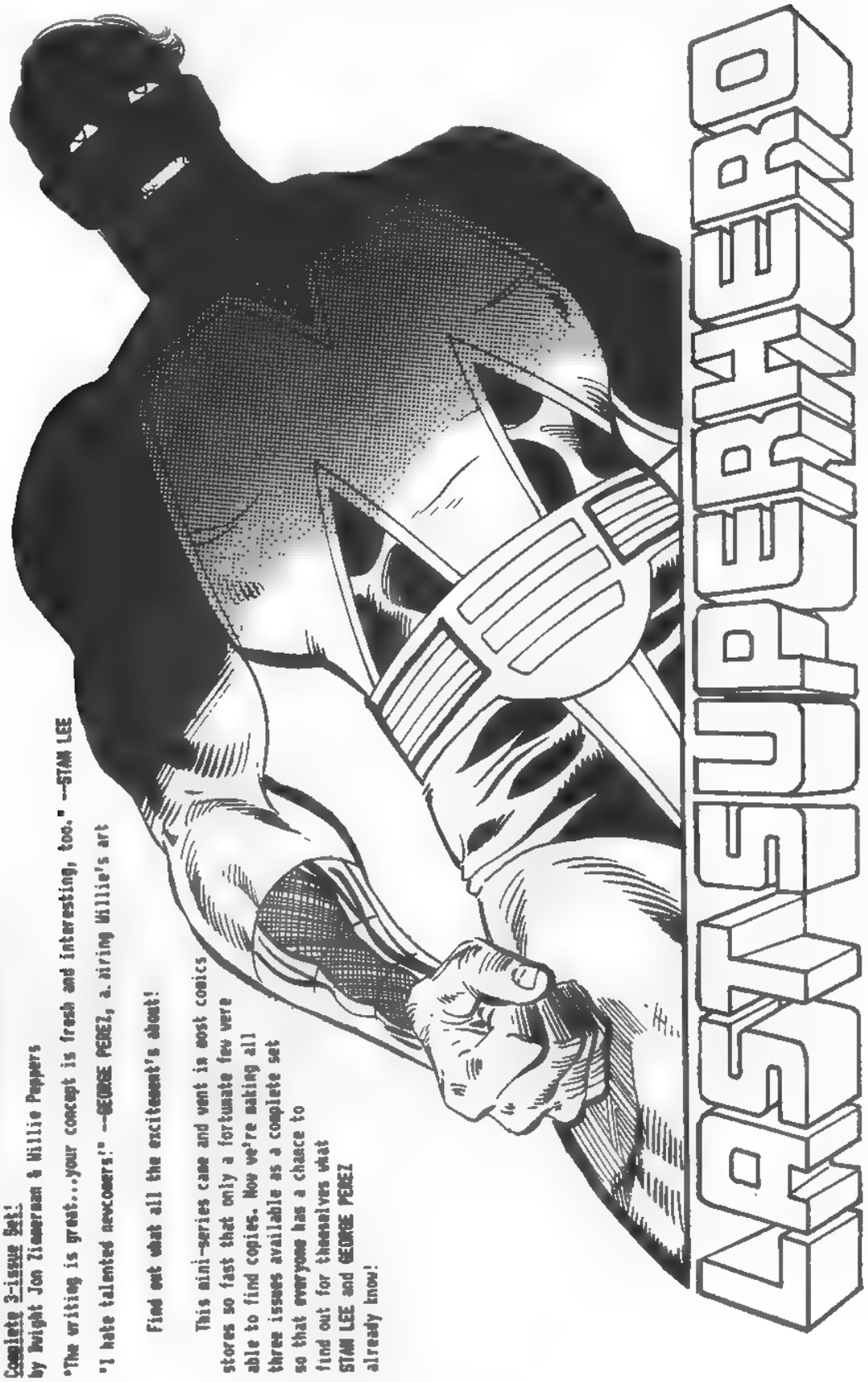
DWIGHT: *That is a bizarre thought.*

MIKE: Well, you've seen their work on GRENDEL, right?

DWIGHT: *Yes.*

MIKE: This is even more bizarre.

Early sketch by Al Milgrom (Spider-Man, Cloak & Dagger, and Punisher).



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B-BESUCHEN WIR DOCH FRAU KOWALSKI
GUTE IDEE
BLAM
BUT IF WE TURNED A CORNER, THEY ALSO TURNED.
ES IST KALT
JA JA
OF COURSE I WAS RIGHT - THEY DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING ON US.
HMMM
THEY JUST WERE WALKING

Comic strip from Chapter Six of "Maus."

DWIGHT: *Anything else?*

MIKE: I urge all shop owners who are reading this to order more copies of KINGS IN DISGUISE from Kitchen Sink and *push* them upon their readers.

DWIGHT: *And why is that?*

MIKE: Because it's the best new comic of the year, it's a literary experience on the order of MAUS or WATCHMEN. If we can get the people who read WATCHMEN to read KINGS IN DISGUISE, they will find the same richly textured story, the only difference is that this is *firmly* rooted in realism; it's a story of the Depression. But if you *value* good storytelling and narrative *detail* and . . . just a story that pulls you in so that you're not *aware* of the medium, then I think you should check this out. There are so many books that I'd like to promote, but that's at the top of the list.

And I should also add I've been lucky to work with some great artists, I'm really pleased with what **Whilce Portacio** is doing in THE PUNISHER. He brings a unique vision to it, very film noireish. I just wanted to get that on record, I don't work with anyone I don't like to and I'm just real happy with his work. I think that Whilce is *the* PUNISHER artist for our times, too bad he's leaving the strip.

DWIGHT: *Who's going to be taking over?*

MIKE: We don't know yet.

DWIGHT: *You've worked with an awful lot of artists, Klaus Janson being the first one on THE PUNISHER.*

MIKE: Yeah, Klaus was great, I'd like him back.

DWIGHT: *And also you've worked with a wide variety on BADGER.*

MIKE: Yeah.

DWIGHT: *Do you find yourself adapting to fit the artists' styles?*

MIKE: Yes, definitely, I ask 'em what they like to draw. *(Laughter.)*

Maus © 1986 Art Spiegelman

"When Punisher started out he

CARL POTTS

All art accompanying this interview is © 1988 M.E.G., Inc.

was much more like [illegible] superhero."

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *Carl, the Punisher has been around for quite a long time —*

CARL POTTS: From about '76, something like that.

DWIGHT: *But it's only been recently that he's really caught on. Why do you think that is?*

CARL: When he first started out, as **Gerry Conway** originally did the character, he was quite a bit different than what we have now. Even though the character didn't have super powers, he was much more like a superhero – I mean he started out being sort of like a partner with this half human, half jackal type of character. But there was something about the Punisher, obviously, that kept people coming back to him. He had several appearances in black-and-white magazines. **Archie Goodwin** and **Conway** wrote that work. And, he would occasionally guest star here and there. He kept coming back and coming back. If you count the number of characters that were created about the same time as the Punisher, from the early to mid '70s, the number of them that have been that long-lived is pretty small. So there was something about him.

And when we came out with the original limited series, that's about the time when there seemed to be a big shift in the pop culture tastes of the public. You know, that's about the time that the big action hero movies were hitting, things like RAMBO — people seemed to get into larger than life heroes with heavy firepower and muscle, something that went *beyond* realism but not to the point of going into fantasy or science fiction. Sociologists can go on and on about why this shift in taste occurred . . . frustration over Vietnam and this and that and so on — who knows?

DWIGHT: *The rise of vigilantism.*

CARL: Yes. Who knows what's going on with that? If history repeats itself the pendulum will swing back in another ten or fifteen years and we'll have another movement and the Punisher type of character may not be in vogue anymore. Some of the bigger name screen characters that are also in that vein. Though I think they may have a surface similarity to the Punisher, the Punisher is more of a three-dimensional character than some of his big screen brethren. I don't think a lot of people realize how three-dimensional the Punisher really is, and that's what I'm trying to show in the book I'm working on.

DWIGHT: *Well, vengeance is probably the one theme that is a constant in PUNISHER, and now I guess in PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL as well?*

CARL: That's one thing. I want to show that revenge is a path that creates sort of a never-ending cycle where you just can't win.

DWIGHT: *Showing the consequences.*

CARL: Right, showing the consequences. If someone did you wrong and you do them wrong, then they'll come back to get you, or their family or friends will, and it just goes on and on. You can see it in Beirut, it's almost a perpetual motion machine once it gets going. And it causes the Punisher to not be able to enjoy life. It's part of his own personal punishment. The Punisher is not only punishing

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Carl Potts
Born: 12 November 1952 — Navy Kid
Occupation: Editor, Artist, Writer
Art Training: Crayola crayons at about four years old in Hawaii, that was my earliest art training. Somewhere in a drawer is an A.A. degree in commercial art.
Early Comics Work: My first job was helping out Alan Weiss and Jim Starlin by pencilling backgrounds on a RICHARD DRAGON, KUNG-FU FIGHTER issue for DC. Then I did new splash pages and pinups for the British reprint department Marvel had at the time. Almost immediately after that I did work at Continuity. Then I went into advertising to make a living.
Worst Professional Experience: I did one story for Gold Key which I don't think ever saw print — thank God!
Comic Book Art Influences: Steve Ditko on DOCTOR STRANGE and SPIDER-MAN, Neal Adams when he first came on the scene. It's tough to get two more diverse influences than those guys — totally different approaches.
Hobbies: Usually I go home and work on freelance assignments. Whenever I can I see my sweet, lovely, girlfriend Cathy Occasionally I'll go fishing or play paintball. Marine aquariums. I'm heavily into that

"I don't think people realize how three-

criminals, he's punishing himself because his family was killed by criminals.

DWIGHT: *He feels guilty about that?*

CARL: He feels guilty about not having properly defended his family. Whenever he goes up against and beats criminals, he has somewhat vindicated himself. But if the bad guys ever hurt or kill the Punisher, again it's what he deserves for failing his family. This is all probably stuff he doesn't realize himself, the subconscious motivations, but that's the approach I'm taking with the character. He doesn't get very close to people very often anymore. He doesn't want a repeat of the pain the loss of his family caused. Also, anybody that hangs out with him for a while usually doesn't live very long. Microchip is his only long-standing ally who's still alive. Even Microchip's own son was killed. So the Punisher denies himself companionship from most people — again as both a punishment to himself and to not set himself up to be hurt again if they're taken away; and also to protect those people from harm since hanging around him is pretty dangerous business.

DWIGHT: *You started out as the editor on the limited series and then as the editor on the ongoing series. During all of this how have you seen the Punisher evolve?*

CARL: **Mike Baron's** version of the character and mine aren't all that different. We could tell the exact same story and the external actions would be similar. I would probably just end up showing more of the internal workings than Mike would. Mike on purpose seems to not want to delve into the interior workings too much. When the Punisher does see someone he cares about being killed, Mike shows him deliberately acting very cold, methodical, and businesslike. A lot of people misinterpret that as the Punisher not caring, but it's the Punisher's defense mechanism. If the character actually stopped to think about the loss, if he didn't take care of business, he'd break down and he couldn't function. That's deadly in his business. Whereas I would, hopefully in a subtle manner, show more of some of his interior workings and his motivations. And my character is probably a little bit less hard-nosed than Mike's, but he still has no soft spot in his heart for hard-core criminals. He will definitely be ridding the earth of large numbers of them in PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL. But he's probably not quite as bloodthirsty or quite as fast to pull the trigger in certain situations.

DWIGHT: *In addition to writing you also do the layouts for —*

CARL: On *most* of the early issues I'll be doing the layouts. The first three issues are a continued storyline I'm doing the layouts for. **Jim Lee** does all of the finished artwork. The next two issues, #4 and #5, Jim will do all on his own. Then #6 and #7, which is the WOLVERINE crossover, I'll be doing the layouts again. #8 has Jim on his own again.

DWIGHT: *Since you're also an artist as well as an editor, I'd like for you to describe like your relationship with the artist on THE PUNISHER. Compare that to an editor who is not an artist.*

CARL: Well, whether it's THE PUNISHER or not, on any book I edit I probably give a little bit more artistic input, especially at the beginning when working with somebody, than some of the other editors. I work with a lot of new folks as well, I've recruited a large number of new people for the company in the years I've been here editing.

DWIGHT: *Could you give us some names, please?*

CARL: Um ... I can name **Jon Boganove, Whilce Portacio, Jim Lee, Scott Williams, Larry Stroman, Dan Lawlis, Terry Shoemaker, Chris Warner, Mark Badger, Randy Emberlin, John Calimee, Sal Velluto,** to a certain extent **June Brigman** and **Art Adams** too — those are some of the ones right off the top of my head. There's a longer list. Most of them have worked out pretty well as far as artistic ability goes, there've only been a few disappointments. Generally I have a fairly strong opinion about what constitutes good comic-book art, in the sense of good, clear storytelling. There are no real good schools out there that I know of, that everybody in all parts of the country have access to that teach comic-book storytelling. That's usually the

cari potts	jim lee	jim novak	john wellington	don daley	tom defalco
SCRIPT/LAYOUTS	FINISHED ART	LETTERS	COLORS	EDITOR	CHIEF OF EDITORS

dimensional the Punisher really is."

weakest element in the samples I see.

DWIGHT: *I've noticed that your assistant periodically, or one of the interns, will be Xeroxing an old —*

CARL: There are a couple of old books that unfortunately are out of print that I often give to new talent. One of which is a great old book on cinematography. Film and comics are so closely related, they're both sequential storytelling media. This book clearly *explains* why talented directors pick the shots the way they do, why they use certain shots to get certain information across, it shows why and how they maintain action flow direction — something that a lot of comic-book people, even some seasoned vets, aren't really aware of.

DWIGHT: *What's its title?*

CARL: THE FIVE Cs OF CINEMA. The five Cs stand for camera angles, continuity, close-ups, composition, and cutting. Anyhow, there are a lot of real basic concepts that the new people don't know. I tell them to study good filmmakers — how and why they tell good stories, since it's tough to find classes in good comic-book storytelling. They need to know how to introduce a scene, how to introduce characters, when to use long shots, medium shots and close-ups and so on. The most classic comic-book storytelling that you can learn from as far as how to tell a clear story in a straightforward no-nonsense manner and with lots of power and lots of information gotten across would be in early Marvel's drawn by **Jack Kirby**. A good storyteller is like a ballet dancer. If they're really good they make it look so effortless that it's difficult to appreciate how much work it is and how difficult it is.

DWIGHT: *Well, they're paid to make it look easy.*

CARL: Yes. If you look back at a lot of **Kirby** panels, or **Ditko** or any good storyteller, and wrote a description of *all* of the information that's gotten across in that panel, you'd have a mile long list. And yet when you look at it it's all there so clearly and done in a way that's interesting and dynamic, the reader just absorbs that information and continues on.

DWIGHT: *But of course readers are a different breed than the artists or the writers.*

CARL: Right, it's like the ballet dancer. If you are a ballet dancer watching a ballet dancer then you can appreciate the difficulty more than the person watching who has had no experience with it, who just absorbs it and enjoys it on a gut level without any intellectualization or knowledge of the work that went into it.

DWIGHT: *How much do you think the Stan Lee, John Buscema book HOW TO DRAW COMICS THE MARVEL WAY has helped?*

CARL: I tell you, it's been so many years since I looked at that it's difficult for me to remember much about it. There was an *excellent* section in there on dynamics. In my own work I've never been known as a real dynamic artist as far as the action scenes go. I've always admired people like **Simonson** who can squeeze a lot of power out of the way they put the forms and shapes together. There was a section in there on what part of an action to show in your panel, the most exaggerated follow-through, say, of a punch. A lot of people will draw the intermediate actions. It's almost as if you have a series of animation cells showing the beginning to the end of a specific action. A lot of people will pick the shot that's somewhere in the

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"Hanging around him is dangerous."

middle, and that's usually not the most dynamic one. I remember that chapter making a big impression on me. There are few people in the business who can even come close to approaching **John Buscema** as far as basic drawing ability. **Garcia-Lopez** would approach that class. Do you want to talk at all about **Jim Lee** — I just want to say some nice things about him since he's so great!

DWIGHT: *Oh, by all means. Okay, since you are collaborating with Jim Lee, how is that going?*

CARL: It's going *very* well, thank you for asking! *(Laughter.)* Jim is someone that **Archie Goodwin** introduced to me up at the offices here some time ago — Archie had seen Jim's work at a convention and asked him to come up here and didn't have any work for him. But he called me over because he knew I was interested in working with good new artists. Jim's samples were *very* good, so I started giving him ALPHA FLIGHT work and he soon became the regular penciller on ALPHA FLIGHT. And each issue he would grow in his ability by . . . he's probably the second fastest growing artist in terms of ability I've ever seen; **Bogdanove** is by far the fastest. That guy moved at light speed! But Jim is the second fastest, just *incredible* leaps in ability.

When I was thinking of people to talk to about working together on WAR JOURNAL, at one point I was talking to Jim on the phone — and I didn't think he'd be interested in working in a collaboration where he wasn't doing all of the artwork all of the time — but he seemed very up for it. I was surprised and delighted, and the work he's turned in so far . . . I couldn't ask for more. If right now I could ask for any artist in the business to work on this with me, and know that they would say yes, I wouldn't still give up **Jim Lee.** I like what he's doing. It was sort of like robbing from myself, because to do WAR JOURNAL he would have to leave ALPHA FLIGHT. I think he's gonna be a big fan fave. He's got the drawing ability to thrill those people that know what good drawing is, and he's got the attention to detail that a lot of the fan/public seems to really crave. So he's got everything that's necessary to become very successful.

DWIGHT: *You talk a lot about how you work a lot closer with newer artists. Having worked with Mike Zeck and Klaus Janson, what was your relation like with them?*

CARL: With **Mike Zeck** we worked together on four of the five issues of the limited series, and Mike's very good. If someone is good the last thing I want to do is make busy work on it. I'd rather have people who could just turn in work I can sit back and admire, you know — never have to ask for any changes! *(Laughter.)* It's great dealing with someone when their pages come in and you just sit there and look at it and drool because the job's so good. Particularly on the first issue of that limited series, that was the case with Zeck. I think there was one panel where I asked him to pull back a little bit to show the action more clearly, and that was it. The first issue of that series is probably one of the high water marks in his career.

DWIGHT: *What happened with that fifth issue?*

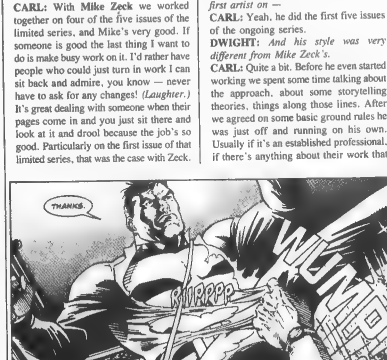
CARL: He just got later and later and later and the series had to go out, so you'd have to ask him why he got later and later and later. I would prefer not to speak for him about that

DWIGHT: *Then Klaus Janson was the first artist on —*

CARL: Yeah, he did the first five issues of the ongoing series.

DWIGHT: *And his style was very different from Mike Zeck's.*

CARL: Quite a bit. Before he even started working we spent some time talking about the approach, about some storytelling theories, things along those lines. After we agreed on some basic ground rules he was just off and running on his own. Usually if it's an established professional, if there's anything about their work that



"The Punisher is not only punishing

I'm slightly leery of or question, I'll talk to them about it before they even begin working on something and see whether or not we have a meeting of the minds on the subject. Perhaps there'll be a vast difference of opinion that we can't agree on. You need to find out before hand. Sometimes with new artists, in fact most of the time with brand-new artists, I have them do quick thumbnails and send them to me first. I'll go over them with the plot and check the storytelling before they do the finished work. That way if there's a problem it's a lot easier to fix there than after they've fully rendered it up and then they get it all back. Being an artist I know how disheartening that can be at times, so I'd much rather have it changed at the earlier easier stage.

DWIGHT: *Getting back to THE PUNISHER and PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL, what's in store for the future?*

CARL: At the end of the first issue I have this one page that has I believe six or eight panels on it and each panel is a slight preview of an upcoming story . . . some which you might not see for years. We have a scene of a huge shape moving in the swampy jungles of central Africa, a shot of the Kingpin, a pair of twin young girls setting a fire in a school, a private army wiping out a village of Indians in South America, a hammerhead shark about to devour a swimmer off the Philippine coast, a wheelchair coming off an assembly line, poppies being grown in the Near East — just little hints like that. You see the Punisher will do some travelling. His home base is always the New York City area, but he'll be doing some travelling.

The first three issues are tied together. They explore three men and their journey down the road of vengeance. One is the Punisher. One is a young man who's just starting on his adult life. The Punisher sees the same motivations in this young man that *he* has. The Punisher knows the path he's taken and he doesn't want this young man to go down the same path. Yet, it would be hypocritical of him to deny the young man from taking the same path he's taken. The third man wants to get back to his family because he's been in prison a long time. He did some bad things for what he felt were good motives. The Punisher and the young man both have it in for this third guy for his past deeds. But all the third guy's trying to do is get back and be a family man now, which of course is what the Punisher in his heart of hearts wishes he could still be. So we have all these tangled pathways crossing. The first

issue also recaps the so-called origin, the death of the Punisher's family.

The fourth and fifth issues will introduce two characters that we'll be seeing again later. One thing the Punisher hasn't had a lot of are ongoing villains, because he usually takes care of them on the first outing. One is a character named Sniper. Another guy who is introduced there will later be a character named Stealth. And then in issue #8 I'll be introducing another character called Damage, who is a street gang leader and will end up being modified to become almost like a new Bullseye. In the first ongoing Punisher book Baron's doing an ongoing storyline with the Kingpin. After that's been done for awhile I'll be doing another Kingpin storyline in WAR JOURNAL.

DWIGHT: *About paintball, is this research for your Punisher material?*

CARL: Well, it can be. For those of you unfamiliar with paintball here's a brief description: It's a large scale version of capture the flag. Everyone on both teams is armed with a CO2 powered pistol that shoots paint filled capsules used to tag out opposing players. I want to do a story some time featuring the Punisher on a paintball field. You see how you react to paintball, like any human endeavor, depends on your personality. To a lot of people it's sort of a catharsis for everyday antagonisms, aggressions, frustrations, whatever. For some people that are really on the edge it could act as a catalyst for even *more* hard hitting action off the field. So most of the people that you meet on the field are very nice people. A lot of them are from Wall Street and are looking for some activity to escape work pressure. But every once in awhile you run into somebody that thinks they're Rambo. When you're out there playing one thing you realize is even the best players throughout the course of the day, are probably going to be shot more than once. If you can be shot by pellets that are stopped by twigs, branches, and wood — things that real projectiles in real war would not be stopped by — that makes you realize just how vulnerable you'd be in real armed combat. But there are a few people out there, that are a little bent and think paintball is like the real thing. They think if they do well in paintball then they could really kick butt in a real battle. So I'd like the Punisher to meet up with one of those people on a paintball field sometime and teach him the error of his ways.

DWIGHT: *You said so-called origin, what did you mean by that?*

CARL: Well, it doesn't really show him sewing his suit together, you know. It's

criminals, he's punishing himself."

his origin in the sense that it shows his motivation for what prompted him to start down the road he's on now. We don't actually show him, figuring out that he's going to wear a certain suit or use certain weapons, he's going to set up a certain household here, that kind of thing. That's what most people seem to see as an origin when you use that word.

DWIGHT: *So . . . there are three Punisher graphic novels now?*

CARL: Well, there's three being worked on but a total of four are planned at the moment. The first one to come out will be by **Jo Duffy** with art by **Jorge Zaffino**, who is a South American artist, *incredibly* talented. This is his first work for Marvel. He's only had a very slight exposure to North American audiences in the past, **Chuck Dixon** brought him to my attention. And it will be colored by **Julie Michel**. There's another graphic novel that's being pencilled right now that **Mike Baron** wrote and **Bill Reinhold** is doing all of the artwork on, and what I've got in so far on that looks incredible as well. **Archie Goodwin** is editing a graphic novel featuring the Punisher by the team that originally did the first limited series. And then there is another one that I have planned with a fellow named **Boaz Yakin**, who wrote the first couple of drafts for THE PUNISHER screenplay for New World.

DWIGHT: *Yes, I was going to ask you about the movie.*

CARL: The last I heard was that they were scouting for locations in Australia awhile back, but I don't know if they're still filming it there.

DWIGHT: *Can you tell us about the story for the movie?*

CARL: I've got the screenplay. It takes some liberties with the character but it's a lot closer to the Marvel character than most Marvel TV and film adaptations have been in the past. I think if it's produced well it could be very popular in today's market, and quite possibly the first of a long string of films. But that's if it's produced correctly. You can have the greatest screenplay in the world and end up with something that just doesn't work. And vice versa, you can have a mediocre screenplay and along the way it gets transformed.

DWIGHT: *Essentially, without giving away too much of the story, what's the plot for the movie?*

CARL: I don't think I should say much, but I can say it takes place in the New York City area and it does cover *their* version of his origin, and deals with him fighting organized crime. That's about all I should say.

DWIGHT: *So they scouted out locations in Australia?*

CARL: *(Laughter.)* Yeah, don't ask me why, I have no idea.

DWIGHT: *With all of this attention it seems that the Punisher has become a real threat to the domination of the mutant titles.*

CARL: I'm not sure about that — but it really is amazing. The sales on THE PUNISHER started high and remained high. As a matter of fact it came out the same month as THE SILVER SURFER and I believe it outsold that. And it's almost *always* in the top five or six rankings on our sales charts. I don't know how long it'll last. Everybody thought THE X-MEN would fade fast, too, and that's been at the top of the charts for many years . . . gosh, I've lost count. So hopefully we can do the same thing. It is interesting because not only is it not a *mutant* book, it's not a superhero book. It's something that really bucks the major trend in comics for the last 30 years. I like that because it opens up the possibility that other more diverse concepts or genres might also be commercially successful.

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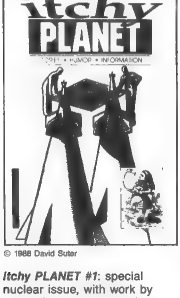

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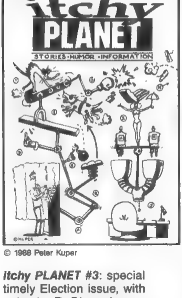

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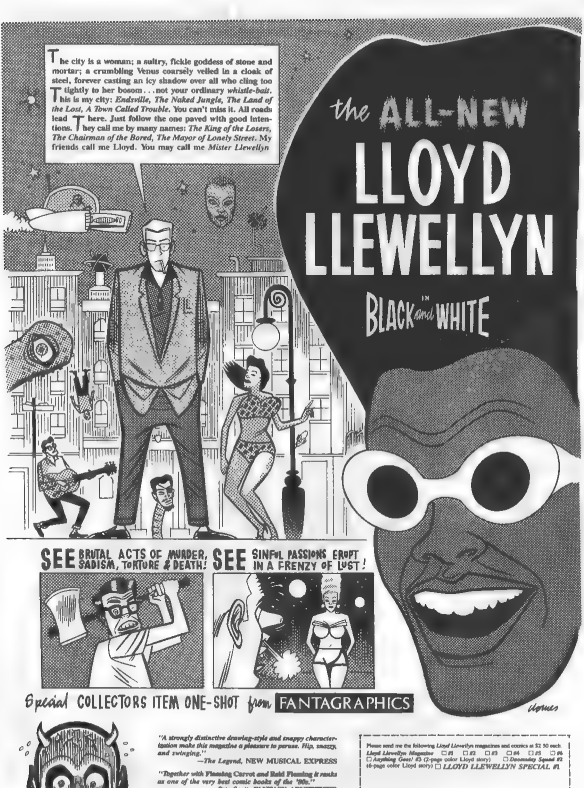
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"Archie (Goodwin) and Carl (Potts) gave me this

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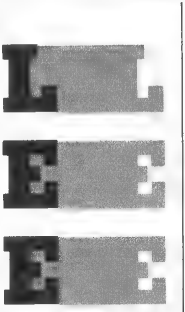

MARK BORAX: *I'm speaking with Jim Lee, artist on PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL. Jim, you're one of the new guys at Marvel —*

JIM LEE: In comics. I'm really new to all this, I don't really know a whole lot. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *You're from St. Louis originally, you just picked up from St. Louis and moved to Berkely.*

JIM: Yeah, it's been about seven or eight months.

MARK: *What were you doing in St. Louis?*

JIM: I was living at home, working and saving up money so I could move out here.

MARK: *Why did you pick Berkely?*

JIM: I was originally thinking of San Francisco and just sort of ended up here. Actually I was thinking of graduate work at UCB, so I thought I'd get a place near it.

MARK: *What would you do graduate work in?*

JIM: Fine art. I sort of got into comics . . . well, accidently. I knew I wanted to do something in the art field. I haven't had much art history, I really decided my senior year in college that I wanted to do something art related.

MARK: *When was that?*

JIM: I graduated in '86 from Princeton.

MARK: *So you were going to Princeton, studying art.*

JIM: No, no, I was a psychology major.

MARK: *But you were drawing.*

JIM: Yeah. Well, in college I was preparing to apply to medical school, that's what I did for four years.

MARK: *And then what happened?*

JIM: Well, senior year I took a life drawing class, really just to lighten up my work load because you have to write a senior thesis, I thought, "Oh, gee, I can just sort of *sit* there and draw and it won't be much homework and I won't have to write papers and stuff." But actually I enjoyed the class a lot, so I took an introduction to painting class in the spring. And that was like the best course, probably because of the teacher, but that was like the best course I had taken for the four years I was there.

MARK: *What kind of stuff did you do?*

JIM: It was an introduction class so she made us do different things. We started in black and white and then we went into color, and then she wanted us to do like an abstract piece, do one where we kind of *played* with the shape, alter the type of material we painted on, a lot of different things. It was a lot of fun. And I just liked *talking* about the art, art related topics, and we went up to her studio and she showed us around New York City. I really was jazzed by all this.

MARK: *What had been your art background before you took those classes?*

JIM: In summer school I'd taken an art course, in high school I took an art course and also an art history course. At the high school I went to they really . . . they expose it to you on a very basic level but they never really encourage people to sort of go into art. It was a small prep school in St. Louis and everyone there . . . it was a *very* fast paced school, you were supposed to become a *leader* of the community, go to med school, law school, business school. That's pretty much what they expect and that's what they were really teaching. It was *definitely* because of going to that high school that I applied to Princeton. I wasn't really thinking about what I *really* wanted to do, you know.

MARK: *Did you read comics?*

JIM: Yeah, I collected comics and read

comics in high school, but I didn't know of any like specialty stores and I didn't even know conventions existed. I bought my comics at the 7-Eleven and my collection was really sporadic, you know, because sometimes issues were in and sometimes they weren't. *(Laughter.)* So I liked comics, actually comic art. Then in college I really kind of lost touch with the whole"thing, partly because no store in Princeton sold comics, and I just didn't have an interest.

MARK: *So here you are on your way to medical school, you take an art class that inspires you, and then what happened?*

JIM: Well, I graduated and I realized I had to work for a living, so at that point I was thinking, "Well, I'll try to do comic-book art and maybe pursue further studies in fine arts." That's why I thought of UC-Berkely. So I started drawing panel to panel stuff, that was the first time I'd drawn like comic-book stuff on a serious level. So I did some stuff up and I sent it to Marvel and got back a rejection but with some notes, it was actually very nice instead of disheartening. So I would say pretty much from August on I was drawing a page a day, just continuing drawing.

At the same time I found this comic-book store in St. Louis and I'd go there

"I did the story right away in like seven days."

and check out back issues and trade magazines. Like first of all I had to find out the *size* these things were drawn. *(Laughter.)* And just generally how this whole thing is done, which is not very well delineated anywhere. So I was drawing stuff, and instead of drawing whole issues, which I originally started out doing, I did like three-page or four-page snippets and try to show that I could do various types of scenes, action scenes, perspective, all of the stuff they want you to do. I found out that from reading magazines.

MARK: *What magazines?*

JIM: I don't really remember the titles, they were just like back issues. COMICS INTERVIEW was one.

MARK: *You used COMICS INTERVIEW to sort of like scope it out?*

JIM: Yeah. You know, like if you're looking for a job you're supposed to investigate the field.

MARK: *What kind of interviews did you read that gave you hints?*

JIM: Usually like how people . . . I remember one was **David Mazzuchelli** and how he got work with **Louise Jones.** I read that and instead of sending stuff to the submissions editor I decided to send it to her; that didn't work. *(Laughter.)* You'd think by now there'd be something out where people interested in the field can sort of look as a resource, but there isn't. There's THE MARVEL TRY-OUT BOOK, but . . .

MARK: *Right. I think a lot of people do use COMICS INTERVIEW. When you don't know anybody and you don't know how anything is done, you can go down and at least read about it.*

JIM: Right. And also actually it turned out the guy who owned the store had done work for Americomics, so I'd go in there and talk with him. Basically I was starting from the ground where I didn't know anything.

MARK: *So you scoped it out and you kept practicing every day.*

JIM: Yeah, drawing. And I went to the library and I got some drawing books, and I was really lucky there, I got ahold of a **George Bridgman** book — at the time I didn't really know who he was. So I used that to help me with my anatomy and stuff, and I just kept working at things I *hated* doing, like backgrounds and stuff like that. You really suffer . . . through that,

CAN'T LET THEM--
--GOT TO CONCENTRATE--
--LOSE MYSELF IN MY FAMILY--
WHAT WILL POWER THIS BOY'S GOT!
LET'S SEE IF HE CAN RESIST A BIG MAC ATTACK!

"I did eleven issues of ALPHA FLIGHT for Carl."

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the patience.

MARK: *So that was that fall?*

JIM: Yeah.

MARK: *Then what was the next step?*

JIM: Mailing stuff in, those little three-page and four-page sequences, to Marvel. But this time it was actually worse, I was getting just flat out rejection notices, and the same from DC. No, I think one time **Dick Giordano** wrote me to keep working at it because it was promising, you know.

MARK: *Yea, Dick.*

JIM: Yeah, yea, **Dick.** He wrote to me, it was like *Wow!* **Dick Giordano!** So I kept on doing this, but it wasn't going anywhere. So I looked in the magazines and they had these conventions listed, like one was supposed to be the biggest one of the year, which was a complete lie. *(Laughter.)* You know, it's like, "Oh, okay," not knowing any better — it was in New York. So I went up there with a portfolio of stuff. I was very lucky in that my work at the time had progressed to a level where the editors would look at it and say, "This is all right." If I had gone like a month before I think I wouldn't have gotten that.

MARK: *Who'd you show it to?*

JIM: I went to the convention and **Archie Goodwin** and **Carl Potts** and **Terry Austin** were all sitting at a table as you came in, they were the first people I saw — it was very intimidating. So I just walked past them, first of all because I didn't know whether they were looking at people's work.

MARK: *And you didn't just want to march right up.*

JIM: Yeah, go, "Will you look at this?" and they'll say, "Sorry, we're just signing autographs." *(Laughter.)* So I sort of walked away and just looked around because I had never been to a convention before and I really didn't know what to say to anybody, didn't know how this was all done. And by the time I got back they were all gone. *(Laughter.)* So I said, "Well, it's no big deal." I had really gone up there to look for any kind of work from small publishers, and some guys would say, "Yeah, give us some samples and we'll give 'em a look and maybe we'll use you."

MARK: *Opportunity knocks but once.*

JIM: Right. But *then* **Archie Goodwin** came back and I sort of overheard him say he'd come back because he'd promised some guy he'd look at his portfolio. So knowing that I said, "Well, would you take a look at mine," since this guy was late. So he looked through it and he said, "How long are you going to be here, in the New York area?" And I told him I was just there till Monday, and he said, "Come into the office on Monday before you leave." And I said, "Great, yeah," you know! *(Laughter.)* Then this other guy showed up and he looked through his work and just sort of told him to keep on plugging at it, so I was really flying pretty high.

MARK: *You probably didn't sleep very much.*

JIM: Yeah, Sunday night I didn't sleep very much at all. You know, here I am preparing to go up to Marvel, and I thought they were going to ask me all kinds of questions.

MARK: *And you had been attempting the art of comics for how long?*

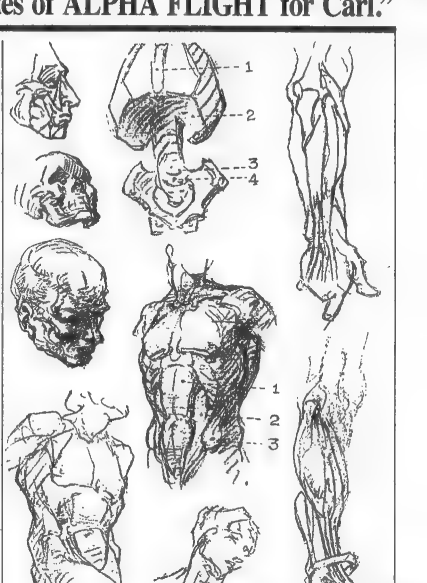
JIM: Since June. *(Answers door.)* This is my girlfriend, Angie. Angie, this is Mark.

ANGIE GIRLFRIEND: Hi.

MARK: *We're doing an interview, feel free to join in.*

ANGIE: Okay.

MARK: *Okay, so you were going to see*



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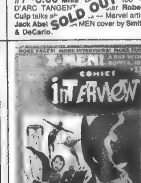

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"My God, I don't want to see this (interview) in print."

Archie Goodwin and you had been for like two or three months working at it?

JIM: Right, yeah, and actually it was pretty good that *he* saw it because I really didn't know all that much about the superheroes, but he does the Epic comics.

MARK: *And you went there Monday and what happened?*

JIM: I had to wait in the receptionist's office. *(Laughter.)* And finally they gave me one of those little stickers and his assistant editor showed up and started dragging me through the Bullpen, rushing me through.

MARK: *And you're looking left and right trying to recognize faces, right.*

JIM: I didn't really *know* any of those faces at that point, I just wanted to see like what all this activity was. And he took me into the office and Archie finally showed up and looked in my portfolio again to make sure I was the one he'd told to come by. So then he took it to show to some editors, and I guess he went to show Carl, and I waited. Then they both came back and sort of gave me the standard bit, said it looks pretty good, and gave me this Vision try-out story to do, and it actually paid! Wild.

MARK: *So you actually walked out with pages of script?*

JIM: Yeah, with a plot in Marvelese, a release form, and a book from Carl about cinematography which talked about storytelling.

MARK: *And a whole bunch of stars in your eyes.*

JIM: Well actually, yeah, it was really neat. I was pretty psyched at that point.

MARK: *So, what, did you get out of there and call your mother?*

JIM: No, no. *(Laughter.)* I just went back, flew home, and did the story. You know, I think I would have appreciated it a lot more if I had been like trying to get into the business for five years and had been working on all of the fanzines or whatever.

MARK: *Right, all these people are going*

Jim likes the work of David Mazzucchelli — so here's some of Dave's pencils from DAREDEVIL #208. (Harlan Ellison provided the idea for this Arthur Byron Cover story.)

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"Eventually I'd like to do some stuff at DC (Comics)."

to read this who have been like five years trying to break in.

JIM: Right, yeah. I've found from talking to people that I got work very fast.

MARK: *Yeah, your story is exceedingly rare. I know of maybe one other person, maybe two other people. I know Berni Wrightson just walked into the offices and was hired on the spot. But usually there's like one to five years of trying to break through, and all of these disappointments and whatnot, so that's pretty good.*

JIM: Yeah, but I didn't know at that point so I couldn't really fully appreciate it.

MARK: *So you went back to St. Louis and this was in '86?*

JIM: Yeah, this was I guess in December.

MARK: *And where were you?*

ANGIE: I was in China.

MARK: *Oh, so you didn't follow all this.*

ANGIE: No.

JIM: I'd write and tell her.

MARK: *When did you come back?*

ANGIE: Last summer.

MARK: *So you were in St. Louis from fall, the autumn —*

JIM: After I graduated until last November.

MARK: *And then you did the Vision story?*

JIM: Yeah. I think the reason why that went real quickly was because I did the story right away in like seven days. I busted my tail on that and wound up staying up real late every day, 'cause drawing was really a *struggle* for me. It still is now but you draw tons, just bull through the paper.

MARK: *And you got it done.*

JIM: Yeah, and my hand was so cramped I couldn't actually draw anymore, and my back was aching. I had never sat in a chair for that long, over a period of seven days, working. This was very new to me. So I mailed that in right away and then Carl called me up and asked if I'd like to do a fill-in issue for ALPHA FLIGHT. So I did that, he gave me like 17 or 18 days to do it.

MARK: *Pencils and inks?*

JIM: Pencils, just pencils, and 22 pages in 17 days, which was really — I mean I can't do that now. *(Laughter.)* I don't know how I did it, but I really worked very hard. I had heard that Carl . . . you know, if you didn't do that on Carl essentially you probably wouldn't get very much more work, for a while at least. I mean he's *really* into deadlines. So I really worked very hard on that.

MARK: *Did you make your deadline?*

JIM: Oh, yeah. And for like the whole last year I was up all night at least once a month just doing these things. So I turned that in and he asked if I wanted to do #53, and he had other people that he was looking at to do ALPHA FLIGHT,

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"I really like those guys like Janson or Mazzucchelli."

and then he gave me #55 and asked if I wanted it full time, so I went for it. That was a real nice time in my career. I wasn't doing anything real regular and it was like going to school and this was a lot of money to make. Also I was travelling a lot, too. I went to visit Angie in China.

MARK: *What did you think of all of this comic-book stuff?*

ANGIE: Well, I knew he'd wanted to get into it. I didn't know that much about comics, I'd never read them or anything, so to me it seemed a *little* strange. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *What the hell's he doing?*

ANGIE: Yeah. I was surprised that he got in that fast, but once he started showing me what he was doing I was a little more impressed. Of course my opinion of comics wasn't very high, but after I realized all of the *work* that goes into them — all of the different steps —

MARK: *Maybe you'll become a comic-book aficionado.*

ANGIE: I wouldn't go *that* far. *(Laughter.)*

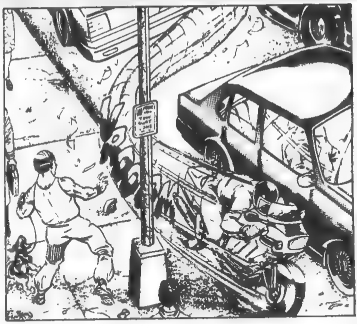
JIM: So I did eleven issues of ALPHA FLIGHT for Carl and he offered me this PUNISHER book that he was writing, which was actually more interesting, so I said I'd do it, and that was a couple of months ago.

MARK: *What's PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL about?*

JIM: Well, it chronicles the life and times of the Punisher.

MARK: *In the past?*

JIM: No, in the present. It's a sister book to THE PUNISHER, this'll be coming out every six weeks



MARK: *Is this an unlimited series?*

JIM: Yeah. I think Carl is writing stories that are more mainstream comic stories. What **Mike Baron** is doing right now is very existential, it doesn't really reveal very many redeeming qualities in anyone including the Punisher. I think Carl is presenting the Punisher more as the hero, the good guy. I think he is developing the character in a better way, there's *no* characterization in **Mike Baron's** stories.

MARK: *What particular things have you done or are you doing that prepare you to do this?*

JIM: Well, I look at what other people have done in other similar type books or whatever, THE SHADOW, THE DARK KNIGHT. I really like those guys like **Janson** or **Mazzuchelli,** you know. And with something like this it's kind of nice because you can also go outside for reference, like for trees. When I was doing ALPHA FLIGHT it was just sort of all this weird wacky stuff, which is sort of fun to do, too, because it's completely up to your imagination. So it's been interesting doing this because I can go look up in reference books, you know, on

ON CHINA: "It's still very much a third world country."

architecture and so on.

MARK: *And living in Berkely is great for any kind of reference books you want to get.*

JIM: Yeah, there's a library just around the corner.

MARK: *Do you look at comics as sort of a temporary station on the way towards something else, or do you look at it as like the final destination?*

JIM: I thought of it more as kind of a temporary thing before, but it's funny when you get into it — and I *enjoy* doing it. I don't think *anyone* would be doing it that didn't enjoy drawing. And definitely it's a childhood thing for me, I really liked comic books as a kid, and it's really nice to think that there's some kid somewhere who's buying my comic books.

MARK: *And in twenty years he'll be competing for your job.*

JIM: *(Laughter.)* Yeah, probably. So before I thought of it as something temporary, but right now it's my career, and it's looking pretty good actually.

MARK: *Yeah, I'll say.*

JIM: I'm on contract now for Marvel and I'm getting a lot of positive feedback, you know, so I'll probably continue in this for awhile. One of the reasons why I opted for this sort of life style as opposed to medicine is that there's a lot more freedom and I felt like if I went to med school that's what it would be for the rest of my life.

MARK: *Just to pay off your school loans.*

JIM: Yeah, definitely. It's like an escalator, you sort of get on and eight years later you're there.

ANGIE: And that's what you're going to do for the rest of your life.

JIM: Right. So I may move into other art related fields, I don't know. Photography interests me, films. I really have to get off my butt and look into these things. *(Laughter.)* It allows me a lot more freedom that most people do not have.

ANGIE: Yeah. I kind of envy his hours, he gets to work whenever he wants, take vacations.

MARK: *What do you do?*

ANGIE: I'm looking for a job right now. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *So you can take any kind of hours you want.*

ANGIE: Yeah. I'm looking into writing, I'd like to be free-lance but be able to make a living. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *What kind of stuff do you write.*

ANGIE: Well, I do a lot of journalism and I'm looking into getting into publishing maybe.

MARK: *How was China?*

ANGIE: It was an experience, it was interesting. You spend a lot of time thinking.

JIM: It's not very modernized.

ANGIE: No.

JIM: It's still very much a third world country and it's *very* difficult for someone who doesn't speak the language quite well to sort of live a day to day existence.

ANGIE: And he only spent three weeks with us. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: And by then I'm going, "Oh, my God, let me out of here!" *(Laughter.)* They have *no* modern plumbing and . . . they just don't offer the same conveniences.

ANGIE: That seems superficial but it gets to you after awhile. If everything else is okay it doesn't bother you that much.

MARK: *Do you have a different relationship to modern conveniences now?*

ANGIE: I just sort of take 'em for granted, I don't think I appreciate them any more. It's easy to get back into it. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: And you think it's a very serene country but you get over there and it's just very loud.

ANGIE: You used your trip as reference.

JIM: Yeah, I did. ALPHA FLIGHT had a story where I used the trip.

"Stuff I never noticed before makes people's art look good."

ANGIE: He went on this Chinese military plane and sat next to this soldier and tried on his uniform.

JIM: Yeah. I didn't speak *any* Chinese but somehow I communicated with this guy that I wanted to try on his uniform, so I got it on and I have a picture somewhere. I don't know if I should be saying this, I don't know if this should be included. I did use the trip actually, to find things I could later use in the comics, so yeah it's true.

MARK: *Don't worry about it, if Marvel fires you there's always DC.*

JIM: Yeah, well . . . yeah, eventually I'd like to do some stuff at DC. But I'm real happy at Marvel, they're treating me *real* well.

MARK: *Do you have friends in the industry?*

JIM: A few, *now*. **Whilce Portacio,** who inked me on ALPHA FLIGHT, the first two issues I did, we talked and he invited me to the San Diego Con.

MARK: *Last year?*

JIM: Right, and we've talked a lot since then, so I guess he's my first friend in the industry. And it's funny how that worked out, because he's on THE PUNISHER now. And I've met **Al Milgrom,** I've been to New York a couple of times.

MARK: *Al's a great guy.*

JIM: Yeah, he gives very good critiques, he's helped me quite a bit. And he was with me on ALPHA FLIGHT for five or six issues and he did a really good job.

MARK: *Yeah, Al's a good editor and he's able to function as a nice . . . like an art editor. He did that for me, too.*

JIM: This stuff's just so dry.

MARK: *No, it isn't.* It feels *that way when you're talking but when you see it in print it doesn't read that dry. It's a real common experience to feel that way.*

JIM: I just find myself listening to myself and thinking, "My God, I *don't* want to see this in print." *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *It won't be bad. I think it's real exciting, the whole story of you breaking in. It's unusual. Half of the people it's going to piss off, and the other half are going to be thinking, "Wow, this is great."*

JIM: Well, I have a lot of advice for people that are interested in breaking in, in terms of how to get your work seen. It seems like if you show the work face to face you've got a better chance — I don't know if that's universally known or not. Sending stuff in through the mail I think your chances are very slim just because they've got *so much* stuff in the offices, just stacks of submissions.

MARK: *So that personal contact is important.*

JIM: Also, editors are often hiring personalities as much as talents, so the stuff that comes in the mail isn't all they want to see anyway. When they meet you they get a feeling of what you would be like to work with. In a business like ours, that has a lot of ego clashing, really it's kind of nice when an editor gets a good feeling for a prospective artist. *(Pause.)* I had all these ideas and now I can't think of anything, it's really weird. *(Laughter.)*

Going to conventions is good, just showing stuff to the artists that are there and listening, really, to what they have to say. I think a lot of people just sort of *show* their work assuming that people will love it, and when people find mistakes or flaws in it they can't really see it and so they don't think it exists. And most of the time I would say that artists or editors looking at a beginner's work are pretty correct in what they say, so you should believe them. But people can get kind of defensive when mistakes are pointed out in their work, and not really like try to correct that.

MARK: *Did you go through that?*

JIM: Yeah, actually. Al and **John Romita** looked at my stuff and pointed out a few things, and at the time in your mind's eye it looks *fine* to you. A character could be too fat or something but you don't really

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"I think it was Austin who suggested I look at my stuff backwards."

notice that.

MARK: *You didn't want to believe it.*

JIM: Yeah! I think your perception has to develop, that's how you get to be a better artist.

MARK: *So at that point did you think they didn't know what they were talking about?*

JIM: No, I knew they were right, I mean I *assumed* they were right, but looking at it I couldn't tell. It's really weird, you just don't notice.

MARK: *Because you don't have the objective eye.*

JIM: Right. Like when I first started drawing I drew my characters with really short legs — this was before I showed my work to Marvel — and they looked *fine* to me. *(Laughter.)* And now I look back on that stuff and say, "God, those legs are so *short!*" *(Laughter.)* And everyone has their own signature, their own way of approaching figures, and when someone points out the head's a little too small, the arms are a little too long, they don't really see it. It's like your blind spot. The way you get better is to really develop your sense and sort of figure out whatever's wrong with your work and then seeing it and correcting it.

MARK: *How did you do that?*

JIM: Actually I think it was **Terry Austin** who suggested that I look at my stuff backwards, either in a mirror or through the light, and that really helped me a lot. You go, "Wow, this eye's really higher than the other, this whole face does not work." Use a mirror, it's a lot easier.

MARK: *And that way you remove your reference point for seeing it as something you did and can look at it more objectively.*

JIM: Yeah, and that really helped me a lot.

MARK: *That's fascinating.*

JIM: I'd look at my faces, chins would be misaligned, eyes would be all wrong, it didn't really look like a face, but when I turned it back around it looked fine. I wondered if it was just me and so I looked at other people's art in the mirror, like a **Paul Smith** face or something, and it looked *fine*. So I go, "Okay, obviously this is a problem with me, I'm sort of subconsciously drawing this way." Now it's at the point where I can do it without having to flip it over.

MARK: *What a great tip from Terry Austin.*

JIM: Yeah, yeah, and actually a lot of people do use that. It's just really weird. I even advise tracing over other people's work just to see how their actually drawing it. It's a real optical illusion sometimes. You look at figure work and you don't really notice how it's put together, but you start tracing it and you go, "Oh, my God, look at how *thin* this face is, how *long* these legs are."

MARK: *And your motor nerves are getting the feel of drawing that way.*

JIM: Right, yeah. On one hand it's sort of developing your mind's eye so you can sort of spot your own mistakes and spot what is good, and also it's developing your hand to know how to do that and correct that physically. It's only been recently that I've been feeling more comfortable with drawing the figure, but I don't want to feel like I've got it figured out because then I'll stop improving.

MARK: *Right. Do you use a lot of photo reference?*

JIM: I used to use a lot more, now I sort of use the mirror and myself, it goes quicker. I really hate looking through a book trying to find the right pose. I just got this Polaroid that I think I'm going to use.

MARK: *Do you use Angie?*

JIM: No, not really. She's not usually around when I'm working, it's just me. So all the women are based on me. *(Laughter.)* But, you know, all my hands I look at my hands, hands grabbing objects. I actually have objects that I grab to see how the contour and the shape changes and then I try to carry that through into my work. Right now I'm getting into a lot of different lighting effects and stuff like that. There's stuff I just never noticed before that makes certain people's art look really good. Like **Janson**, I never realized before all of the back-lighting and double-lighting he does with his figures, and now I'm sort of looking into doing some of that. And that's what I like about this business, I'm continuing learning and I feel like just anything will go into my work.

"I was late and they fired me.

CHRIS WARNER

Photo: Jarret Balsam

Chris Warner is a hard guy to figure out. At times he can seem antagonistic, while at other times he seems like he's almost the guy you might conceivably take home to your mother's relative.

Chris is on the shorter side, with long black hair, and he's been wearing the stubble look for a lot longer than Don Johnson or George Michael have. He's often dressed in a fringed leather jacket, always has a pair of sunglasses (although I've never seen him wear them), and generally looks a little...uh...rugged. The best way to describe him is to say that Chris looks almost as if he stepped out of the BLACK CROSS stories he does for Dark Horse.

I believe it was Chris who coined me the nickname "the young upstart" around the Dark Horse offices, as whenever we would see each other we would try to playfully top each other's put-downs. Somewhere along the line I think we started respecting that each of us was great with sarcasm and that there were a lot of other things and people we could loose it on than ourselves. Of course, that's my version, and Chris might say I was full of it.

Chris is deserving of respect, though, if only for the fact that he is not afraid to take a chance and not afraid to speak his mind. In this interview he says quite a few controversial things — things many artists and writers would balk at even thinking. Chris knows what he is in this business for and works only on projects he wants to.

Self-aware and cynical, rugged and outspoken, Chris Warner is one of the

All material accompanying this interview is TM & © 1990 Dark Horse Comics, Inc., unless otherwise noted

I was glad they fired me."

more interesting people I've interviewed. On second thought, maybe you should think twice about taking him to see your mother's relative though . . . unless she's good at verbal banter.

ANDY MANGELS: *Chris, we'll start with the boring section first, how did you start out in the business?*

CHRIS WARNER: Basically just I took some samples down to the 1983 San Diego Con and showed them to all of the editors down there, **Carl Potts** liked it and he gave me a sample to work on. I moved to New York and got work on ALIEN LEGION and went on from there. That's the big story. *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *You did MOON KNIGHT and quite a run on ALIEN LEGION.*

CHRIS: And about a year's worth of DOCTOR STRANGE, it seemed like a lot longer. *(Laughter.)* But then of course I did *one* BATMAN story for DC which we don't have to *talk* about a whole lot! *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *Well, what is the story behind the ill fated BATMAN project?*

CHRIS: In a nutshell I got fired, I was late and they fired me. I was glad they fired me, I was glad to be out of there. I don't want to get into it too much, but it was not the kind of situation that I was led to believe that it was going to be, and that's nothing unusual in the comics business. It just wasn't the project that I thought it was going to be and I deserved to be fired because I was real late on it. I just had no enthusiasm for it after a few things fell through.

ANDY: *Were you disappointed with the story?*

CHRIS: I just think it was a bad situation all the way around. I wasn't happy with my work or anything else in the whole thing, I wasn't happy with anything period. Well, I did finally get a royalty check out of them. *(Laughter.)* It came at

THE AMERICAN by Grant Miehm & Chris Warner (created by Mark Verheiden).

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Christopher Marshal Warner
Born: 4 October 1955
Residence: Portland, Oregon
Height: 5'5"
Favorite Chord: 'E', very loud
Education: 32 years of watching television
Credits: ALIEN LEGION, MOON KNIGHT, DR. STRANGE, BATMAN (sort of) BLACK CROSS, THE AMERICAN
Favorite Comics: REID FLEMING, LOVE & ROCKETS, FLAMING CARROT, CONCRETE, and ROACHMILL
Favorite Instrument: Ruger GP-100 .357 Magnum (stainless steel) and a Marshall Amplifier on 10
Pet Peeve: Everything!
Comic Artist Influences: Milton Caniff, Jaime Hernandez, and Jack Kirby
Personal Influences: Joseph Conrad, Charles Manson, Jeff Beck, Morton Downey Jr., Jonny Quest and Wayne Newton
Favorite Non-Comic Pastime: Television and handguns (''preferably at the same time'')
Favorite Bands: The Cleavers, Black Flag, and Zodiac Mindwarp and the Love Reaction
Favorite Word: Swingin'
Most Bizarre Accomplishment: Shower Of Porn at the last Cleaver show (''You figure it out!'')

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"I have very few criticisms of Marvel and DC."

a time when I was basically fed up with doing your average superhero trash. You know, I was basically in the same type of situation, I just *wanted* to do a different kind of work, better work. And working for Dark Horse, a smaller company with people I know that are a little bit more committed to quality stuff, was more what I had in mind. I mean I don't blame anybody for firing me on that, I was certainly late enough to warrant it, but I just realized that I'd gotten to the point where I couldn't *do* that type of work anymore. It was probably for the best. Getting me out of their hair was probably for the best from the DC standpoint. *(Laughter.)*

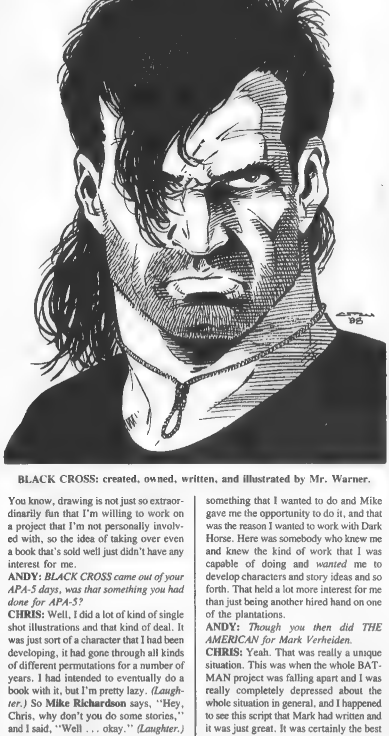
ANDY: *And you went from being a relative unknown —*

CHRIS: A *total* unknown! *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *And now you've gotten a lot of good press for BLACK CROSS, and some of your other stuff coming up looks fairly exciting. How did you get involved with Dark Horse, and why them as opposed to another independent company?*

CHRIS: Well, when I first moved to New York to try to break into the business **Randy Stradley** went out there to break in at the same time, and I'd known Randy for a few years before that, and **Mike Richardson** was someone I'd known through APA-5 and he had a bookstore here in town, so I just *knew* these guys. Mike had always had an interest in getting into publishing and he'd seen some of my sketches and so forth for BLACK CROSS and said it was something he'd like to publish if he ever got the chance, and once he got the company going I realized that their direction was along the lines of more of the kind of work that I wanted to do. You know, *less* emphasis on straight ahead superhero mutant ninja trash and all of the rest of this stuff, I wouldn't have to deal with that kind of thing.

They were more interested in getting *my* creative input and doing the kind of work that I was interested in. Not only that but I think they've *proved* that they do have a commitment to putting out stuff that's a little bit less conventional and certainly more interesting than what most of the other publishers are putting out. The other independents, to me — although on occasion I certainly wouldn't mind working for them — but I didn't really see that much opportunity to do the kind of work that I wanted to do. Part of it was the fact that I didn't really have a track record, I didn't have a real reputation for selling a lot of books, so it would be a matter of getting stuck drawing another title created by someone else, and that didn't appeal to me.



BLACK CROSS: created, owned, written, and illustrated by Mr. Warner.

You know, drawing is not just so extraordinarily fun that I'm willing to work on a project that I'm not personally involved with, so the idea of taking over even a book that's sold well just didn't have any interest for me.

ANDY: *BLACK CROSS came out of your APA-5 days, was that something you had done for APA-5?*

CHRIS: Well, I did a lot of kind of single shot illustrations and that kind of deal. It was just sort of a character that I had been developing, it had gone through all kinds of different permutations for a number of years. I had intended to eventually do a book with it, but I'm pretty lazy. *(Laughter.)* So **Mike Richardson** says, "Hey, Chris, why don't you do some stories," and I said, "Well . . . okay." *(Laughter.)* I still have a lot of work on it, a lot of work that is supposedly in progress, let's say it that way. *(Laughter.)* But it was something that I wanted to do and Mike gave me the opportunity to do it, and that was the reason I wanted to work with Dark Horse. Here was somebody who knew me and knew the kind of work that I was capable of doing and *wanted* me to develop characters and story ideas and so forth. That held a lot more interest for me than just being another hired hand on one of the plantations.

ANDY: *Though you then did THE AMERICAN for Mark Verheiden.*

CHRIS: Yeah. That was really a unique situation. This was when the whole BATMAN project was falling apart and I was really completely depressed about the whole situation in general, and I happened to see this script that Mark had written and it was just great. It was certainly the best story that I'd ever had the opportunity to perhaps work on, it was just something really different. Basically all of the work

Black Cross TM & ... 1988 C. Warner

"I'd done a lot of work for Marvel but

I've done for Marvel and DC, and it's not necessarily the writers or anything, but the kind of *restraints* that you're under to do that kind of work just sort of preclude the possibility of doing anything worth a damn. For *once* I was seeing a story that was outside of the very narrow parameters that most Marvel and DC stuff, in most comics in general — this was something just so refreshing and so different.

ANDY: *Even though it was a superhero?*

CHRIS: Well, but it was not really a superhero. I mean there was some action but it was more a character book, and more of a kind of wry commentary on a lot of different subjects. And to a certain extent to me it was kind of being able to take kind of a left turn, you know, or get a kind of weird perspective on the kind of work that I'd been doing — not exactly to strike back at it. I wouldn't go so far as to say it's superhero satire or parody because it isn't, but it uses some of the cliches and so forth and kind of twists them around in a very powerful story that was just funny as hell.

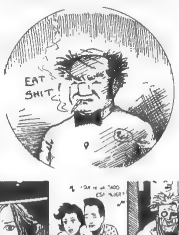
I knew it was going to be difficult work because it was a very complicated script, but I'd done a lot of work for Marvel or whatever that was *also* difficult but the stories didn't warrant the work. Again, I don't blame the writers for that because that's basically what's expected of them. You know, they're not expected to do good work, it doesn't matter. There's basically — and this is part of my problem with some of the larger companies — there's no standard of quality. Mediocre work is fine, good work is fine, great work is fine. There's a very low level beyond which one can't go, you know, but mediocre 50th generation rehashings of '60s cliches are perfectly fine as long as the work is turned in on time. *(Laughter.)* This business is getting work in on time, you know. So with THE AMERICAN it was just nice to see something that was well written.

I think plenty of the writers and artists in this business are capable of doing a lot better work than they're doing, but there's no incentive for them. When I was first trying to break into this business I remember an editor at Marvel was looking at my work and seeing how detailed it was, and he said, "You know you get paid by the page." You get paid the same amount per page whether you do one page a day or five pages a day, and that's eventually kind of knocked into everyone's head in a kind of subliminal way I think; that if mediocre work is acceptable why not just do it. They don't mind, you know, and if you *can* bang out four pages a day why not, you're going to make more money. That's what it basically comes down to. Unless you yourself *want* to do superior work and are willing to *fight* for it and go through a lot of hell, there's no real incentive to do so; you have to do it on your own pretty much. And not only that but the larger companies are more conservative in their approach, and that's fine with me but I just can't work under it.

ANDY: *Do you think that situation's changing with the advent of fairly famous creators a la Alan Moore, Frank Miller, even Paul Chadwick, that are doing these really intelligent stories within —*

CHRIS: It's changing to a certain degree but it's a very few people who are willing to do that work. CONCRETE, Paul tried to sell that book, or **Mike Friedrich** his agent did, for a number of years, shopping it around to the publishers, and *nobody* was interested. *Now,* of course, once Dark Horse published it, all of the other publishers started jumping into line. But still if you look at the overall mass of material out there, I don't think that there's that many more avenues to do good work than there ever was before. There *are* for certain creators who have a situation of either (A) having a publisher who's willing to, you know, pay the guy a decent living wage and take the risks of putting the book out, or (B) when someone gets to the point where they've sold enough Marvel or DC books to have enough fan base to accommodate doing different kinds of work.

But *still* for the most part a lot of people who are perfectly capable of making decent money doing better work are still being massaged back to Marvel and DC because there's lots of money there. It's a real temptation, especially if you do go to the degree of doing some less commercial work and you don't get your ass kissed



The comics that Chris loves to read (clockwise): Reid Fleming, world's toughest milkman; Flaming Carrot; Concrete; and Love & Rockets.

Reid Fleming © 1988 David Boswell / Love & Rockets © 1988 Gilbert, Jaime, and Mario Hernandez / Flaming Carrot © 1988 Bob Burden / Concrete © 1988 Paul Chadwick

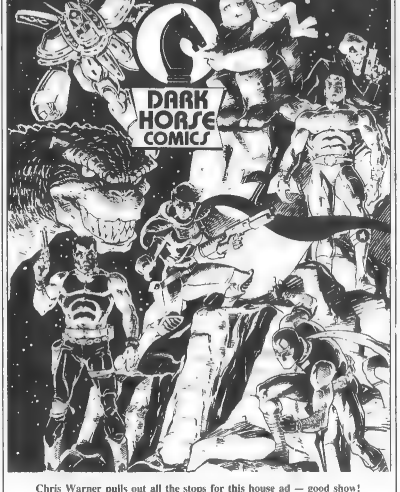
the stories didn't warrant the work."

by fans quite as much and you don't make quite as much money; then someone lays out a nice big SPIDER-MAN or BAT-MAN project where if you're willing to do that kind of work you can make a lot of money. It's real difficult to say, "Well, gee, I'd rather make one-tenth as much money this year by going out on a limb as I made last year." So the money element is still real important right now because it's still not possible to make tons and tons of money doing that good work.

ANDY: *You have a very controversial view of some creators who* do *get a lot of money a la creators rights and so forth, as you talked about in the BLACK CROSS SPECIAL. Do you want to discuss —*

CHRIS: Yeah, sure! *(Laughter.)* It's real easy for us guys sitting out here, you know, just barely squeaking by making a living, to throw rocks at the guys that are making a lot of it, and I think that's the way it should be. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, I just think that a lot of people, a lot of creators, have talked big about creative freedom and yet have *consistently* gone back to Marvel and DC to do projects with characters owned by those companies, and I just don't see it. You see constantly in these areas a lot of criticism, you know, laid at the feet of Marvel and DC, and *basically* I have very few criticisms of Marvel and DC because I think they are just exactly what they are and what they've been for however many years and I don't *expect* them to change. This is not because they're some sort of venal fascistic institutions, it's just the fact that they are larger money-making conservative companies. They have usually changed policies when they have had to, you know.

And I'm not painting them as being saints either, they've certainly put a lot of people through the wringers, **Jack Kirby** for one; but I think in a lot of cases that's been dependent on who's running the company and under what circumstances. Still, for the **Millers** and **Chaykins** and the like, on and on, those guys I think have — and I don't want to criticize these guys too strongly because they can afford to have me killed — *(Laughter.)* But it's just the fact, I think, that it's the temptation of money, of being able to do a DARK KNIGHT project and make more money than anybody's ever made in comics. And after you finish that there's always the temptation of, "Well, that was great having all of that dough, maybe I'd like to do it again." Yet my feeling is if you *want* to do work for Marvel and DC fine, but *admit* that you are a hired hand doing a job to make a buck. That's cool. I'm certainly not above that myself, sometime in the future I might need to have my teeth fixed or something and be willing to do a DARK SPIDEY or something. *(Laughter.)*



Chris Warner pulls out all the stops for this house ad — good show!

But once you've proven that you've got a fan base and you can exist without having to do those things, if you really do have a commitment to creative freedom and doing superior work then *that's* what you should do, and find a way to do it as quickly as possible rather than trying to push these monolithic companies that are not going to give up ground easily. Those companies tend to make changes when the pressure's coming from an outside force, like Marvel and DC started paying royalty and incentive payments because Pacific was doing it.

ANDY: *Now they're doing creator rights —*

CHRIS: Because *other* people are doing it. Marvel and DC, you know, are trying to protect their market share, they're going to do whatever's necessary to do that. I think they're putting out too many comics, they're putting out a lot of trash, and they're hiring people that don't deserve to get work; but on the same token my feeling is that if you are *really* to the point where you can go it on your own, where either you can cut a deal with a publisher that will give you *exactly* what you want or, you know, you can afford to publish your own stuff, that's what you should be doing rather than going, "Oh, Marvel, DC, censorship, fascists, Nazis." That's ridiculous.

ANDY: *And then turning around and working for them.*

CHRIS: *Yes*, exactly! That tends to be the

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"I'm not the renegade, I'm not the last angry man."

thing that you find more often than not. When the guys on the top of the food chain push for accommodations from the companies, those accommodations tend not to trickle down to us poor slobs down at the bottom of the food chain. *They* get it and I don't. As a matter of fact I know specifically of situations when I was working at Marvel where once someone *had* been given a greater accommodation higher up, you know, to someone that has clout, that there's almost an even *greater* reluctance to let those things trickle down It's like, "We had to go through all this crap with him, we're sure as hell not going to go through this for Joe Blow at the bottom of the ladder." They sort of tighten up ranks to a certain extent. They tend to view — because it *is* an adversarial situation and basically they're only going to put up with it for somebody who can make a lot of money for them — the people without that kind of sales clout aren't worth it, it's not going to happen.

However, if those guys would go outside Marvel and DC, strike their claims on the outside, create characters and stories and property under *no* creative constraints whatsoever, eventually Marvel and DC would tend to follow suit; and my feeling, too, is once those guys leave they shouldn't come back. Too often guys will hop company to company, you know, in this sort of ping-pong effect where I — not speaking of me personally — I go to Marvel, make a bunch of dough, get ticked off for A and B and C, run over to DC and say I want A and B and C, they give me A and B and C, I make a bunch of dough, then I get ticked off at them for D and E and F, go back to Marvel and get D and E and F. But again, that doesn't necessarily affect anybody else tremendously. On the other hand if those guys said, "I'm never working for you again" — and this is what Alan Moore has often done when somebody jerks him around — I think that that's the way to do it. It's better to go out, do your own thing, get the market expanded from that, rather than just leaving long enough that they'll give you what you want so you'll come back, but perpetuating the same situation because they're making the money.

Rather than doing things to change the company they'll do something cosmetic for the guy who's capable of making a lot of money for them. If you look at the number of books that Marvel and DC put out, the real quality packages are real tiny

PREDATOR TM & © 1988 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corp. All rights reserved. TM designates a trademark of Twentieth Century Fox Film Corp. Used by permission.

PREDATOR art by Chris Warner.

"If you work for Marvel and DC, you are

minorities. And again if they want to do superhero books, if they want to do a *billion* of 'em, that's cool, but I don't think there's any reason trying to fight for a lot of creative freedom when creative freedom is already available someplace else. It's not available for as much money, but the thing is — in comics, in film, in anything else — if you want to do the kind of work that you want to do and do more artistic work, you're probably not going to make as much money doing it. So either say you want to make money or be an artist and worry about the money later. You can't have both. You can't say you want total creative freedom and expect them to give you all of this dough at the same time. Maybe eventually if the business widens enough so that there are more people reading comics you can afford to do less conventional stuff *and* make a pile of money. But I don't see much sincerity in claiming to want creative freedom while still going for the buck time and time and time and time again. And I'm not rating the quality of the work, either.

ANDY: *You're basically saying they're kind of mouthing platitudes.*

CHRIS: Yeah.

ANDY: *But they're not putting their necks on the line.*

CHRIS: Absolutely. I mean they're putting their necks on the line only as far as, you know, the fact that they won't do some work for awhile But these guys are pretty well set up and they tend not to go on the risk for too long, you know. They'll raise a lot of flak and make a lot of noise, but they still seem to end up doing the same project after project after project for these horrible venal bastards that are making their lives such misery. And I personally don't *want* somebody who's making six figures a year or more acting as a spokesman for *me*. And again I'm not working for these other guys either, I'm not working for Marvel and DC, and it's no big vindictive thing, I just don't want to do that kind of work. I don't want to draw DAREDEVIL or BATMAN or *any* of 'em. So I don't want somebody who's not willing to go even as far as I've gone to be railing against the system when they could do just like what I did and say, "I'm not gonna work for these guys anymore!"

ANDY: *Do you see a time when you will work for Marvel or DC?*

CHRIS: Well, I don't know, I wouldn't ever say never. When I was working for them, you know, all of the freelancers would get together and go *"Damn* this editor, **Shooter** this, blah blah blah," on and on and on. But it all boils down to you don't *have* to work for those guys. And *now*, after not working for them, I have a lot less against them. My feeling is if you want to do good work, you want to do the kind of work you want to do, go where you can do it as opposed to banging your head against the wall. As far as I'm concerned if Marvel did nothing but mutant and toy books and the like, I have no problem with that at all. Probably my *main* complaint with Marvel and DC is they're not really trying to expand the market very much, and other than that I've got no real beef against them. They pay good money. But why fight for some kind of creative autonomy when you're drawing somebody else's properties? That doesn't make any sense, it's ridiculous.

ANDY: *Now let's get back to your career a little bit, what you're doing. You've got one upcoming project that is somebody else's property, PREDATOR.*

CHRIS: Yes, I *am* willing to sell out at

ZOOLOU from ROACHMILL (Hedden/McWeeney), one of Chris' favorite series (from Dark Horse Comics).

Zoolou TM & © 1988 R. Hedden/T. McWeeney

a hired hand doing a job to make a buck."

the right price! *(Laughter.)* The situation just never presents itself enough. You know, I *should* be doing BLACK CROSS, but it sounded like kind of a fun project to work on, a lot of just good slam bang violence and goofy crap like that. I think it's going to be a good book, and I just thought that it would be nice to do a book that has a little bit of reader identification,

THE MARK by Larry Stroman & Chris Warner.

and be able to get my name a little bit more exposure without having to go and do SPIDER-MAN or something. And like I was saying before, I don't really care if somebody wants to be an artist or not, my feeling is do the projects you want to do. And this sounds like it might be fun, and I certainly don't paint myself as being a . . . a **Picasso!** *(Laughter.)* I'm just trying to make a living.

ANDY: *The ultimate renegade.*

CHRIS: Yeah. I'm not the renegade, I'm not the last angry man or something, I'm just trying to do work that's interesting to me, and some work that's fun. I *like* doing a variety of projects, I don't like doing anything for too long, so it's kind of fun to go from something like THE AMERICAN, which was a real *difficult* book with a lot of character interplay and really interwoven plots, to something like this PREDATOR which should be a pretty straight ahead action oriented type of thing, and then go from that to BLACK CROSS which will be a little more spaghetti Westernish, you know, kind of Zen bullshit or something. *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *Yeah, you just brought up the last angry man and that sounds like BLACK CROSS.*

CHRIS: Yeah. BLACK CROSS is something I wouldn't want to do every day, you know, or every year, an on-going series. That's *harder* for me to do than almost anything else because I don't really write all that much, you know. It's *my* baby, I'm doing it all, and I do want it to be *right*. I want it to address some things that interest me philosophically and in terms of storytelling and some other things.

But I'll work on that for awhile and then I'll want to do something just maybe totally goofy or totally different. I want to kind of avoid the trap I think a lot of artists and writer-artists have fallen into, because they're one trick ponies to a certain extent — which is unfortunate because I think they have a lot more talent, far more talent than even people who are *recognized* as being big talents. They would do themselves a great service by not consistently doing the same kind of work over and over again. So that's what I hope to do, to kind of go project to project, in terms of drawing it approaching it a little bit differently, or go from something really heavy to something really light, or something real complex to something real simple. I could even see myself doing some kind of punch-it-out superhero junk sometime, just because it might be *fun* to do that. I don't take this business all that seriously.

ANDY: *Now your next BLACK CROSS series is called MY WAR?*

CHRIS: Yeah. Originally it was going to be black-and-white but I think that they're thinking about doing it in color.

ANDY: *Randy and Mike said you might be only writing this series.*

CHRIS: No, no. There's another series that I'm in the planning stages on that I may just be cowriting in some capacity,

"You can't say you want total creative freedom

that's called PIT BULLS; not a *mayhem* oriented series, a *slaughter* book. *(Laughter.)* I'll be collaborating with a fellow by the name of **John Arcudi**, and he writes pretty good, we have sort of similar tastes. Again, I'm not sure exactly to what capacity I'll be involved in it. I'm also going to be editing a couple of books for Dark Horse, that will probably be one of them. So I created the series and will have some input on it, I don't really know. I have discussed a lot of projects with Randy and Mike, but I just don't have time to do them all. They're excited about them, think they'll be good propertues, but it's a matter of getting them out there. And I'm pretty slow and relatively lazy. *(Laughter.)* But BLACK CROSS I'll be doing everything except the coloring, I probably won't do that.

ANDY: *Given the fact that you're slow and lazy, when do you expect to get the next BLACK CROSS out?*

CHRIS: Any day now, any minute! *(Laughter.)* I don't know, I'm not really sure, but it'll happen and I'm in no great hurry and I don't think anybody else should be. *(Laughter.)* If they're in their right minds they won't be in any particular

hurry. I would imagine it's going to be '89 — or not. *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *Now a lot of your series have shared something in common, ALIEN LEGION, BLACK CROSS, THE AMERICAN, PIT BULLS — they're all fairly violent books. Do you see yourself as a violent person?*

CHRIS: I'm not a particularly violent person, but I guess my work kind of belies that. I haven't been in a *fight* since I was twelve years old or something, though I do own a handgun. *(Laughter.)* I do go out to the range and shoot. I *like* action oriented stuff, you know; I'm just as much of a geek as anybody. Not that I wouldn't want to do any other kind of work, but again it's a situation where you're trying to make a living. If I get to the point where all of these *readers* will just buy my books and make me a rich man then I promise to *God* I'll do a book of just nothing but conversation.

ANDY: *Or romance.*

CHRIS: We'll have people walking along sandy beaches and in outdoor cafes and all that kind of crap. I'll be more than happy to do some real artistic work once people start giving me the dough. *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *Speaking of artistic works, something's popped up in a lot of your books lately, Bloodmen?*

CHRIS: Yeah, that's a band that I'm in right now, just sort of . . . I don't know exactly how to describe it, sort of barrage thrash hard-core something or other. Real

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and expect all this dough at the same time."

loud and very obnoxious. Part of the reason I don't take comics all that seriously is because I have other interests as well. Comics is something that's *part* of my life, and music's part of my life, and television is a *major* part of my life. *(Laughter.)* Watching it.

ANDY: *What do you do in the band?*

CHRIS: I play guitar and I write tunes and do some backing vocals. The band has been kind of out of commission for awhile, and I managed the band for a little while, and now I'm just a second guitarist and we're just getting together to start playing again.

ANDY: *Think you'll ever do a flexidisk for BLACK CROSS?*

CHRIS: I thought about it. For awhile I had a band called Badlands, sort of heavy metal spaghetti Western kind of stuff, and I did actually *write* a song called "Black Cross," so I thought about possibly doing a flexidisk. Also in the second story that I did there was this Rita character who within the context of the story was talking about how she had been in a band, Rita and the Saddle Studs, and we were thinking about doing a single of this band. As a matter of fact the young lady who I used as a model for that character was a singer in a kind of a cowpunk band, I was thinking of using her and people in her band to do this. Some of this may happen, who knows. It's kind of fun for me to put together songs and do some music. My interests are varied enough that I'd like to get as much into as I can. Hell, if I'm writing it I might as well do it! *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *At 32 and relatively new to the business, how did you get such a cynical world view?*

CHRIS: Well, at 32 I think it's hard *not* to have a cynical world view. *(Laughter.)* I don't know. I don't consider myself to be a cynical person, I don't consider myself to be a *happy* person or whatever, I just find that life is full of a little bit more compromise than I would like. And I'm a fairly compromising person, I'm willing to compromise myself for a buck like anybody else, but . . . there's an element of that in my work, of cynicism, of expecting the worst to happen. I sort of have that philosophy of hope for the best but prepare for the worst, because the higher the expectations you have the harder it is to meet them. When you have very low expectations you're rarely disappointed. *(Laughter.)*

ANDY: *What do you hope for your future career then?*

CHRIS: I don't know, I would like to do as many things as I can. I'm not a workaholic but I like to have my work varied, so I'll do some art and do some writing and play on my guitar. And I'll be doing some editing for Dark Horse, which should be a lot of fun. *(Laughter.)* Considering all the hell I've got from editors I now know every excuse, not too many freelancers will be able to pull over stuff on me! *(Laughter.)* But just the ability to do a variety of different things — I guess I have a real *short* attention span or something. *(Laughter.)* And working with people, getting more involved with that end of Dark Horse. Dark Horse is a company that I feel really strongly about, I've been there from the beginning. And it's a company that I think has a lot of potential to go somewhere. Rather than just being one of the creators of various properties I'd like to be there for some of the direction of it and hopefully get to go to some conventions for free. *(Laughter.)*

Chris Warner + MOON KNIGHT = this "Amazing Heroes" cover from 1984 (minus the logo, etc., etc.).

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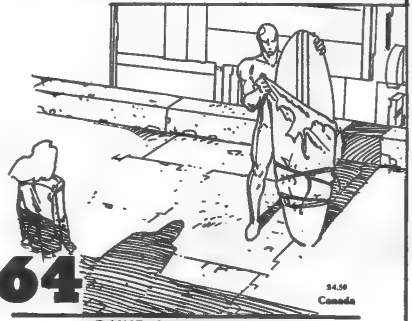

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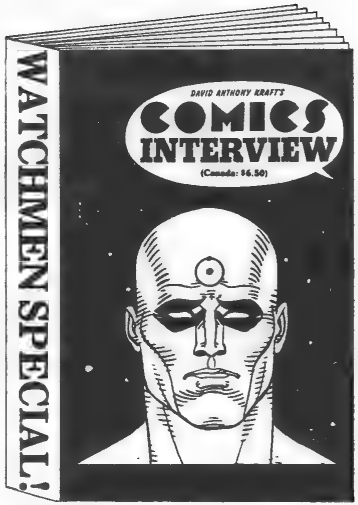

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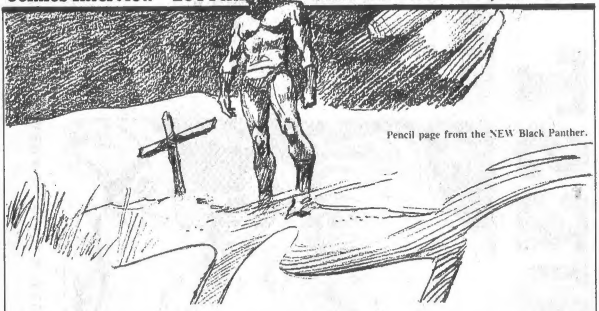

Pencil page from the NEW Black Panther.

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW.

Nice to see **Gene Colan** in the spotlight for once. It's all too rare, unfortunately. I don't understand why, in that he's easily one of the most stylized and original artists around.

Unlike your interviewer and Gene himself, I most fondly remember his work, not for DRACULA but rather his sleek yet powerful version of Iron Man way back when in TALES OF SUSPENSE. Can't be easy to take over an established strip and not suffer in comparison to the original artist but Gene (and Iron Man) really managed to shine. If his isn't the definitive version of the character, it's certainly my favorite.

That's what really ticked me about his departure from Marvel in the early '80s. He was announced as drawing a then-upcoming IRON MAN fill-in (#151, I believe). Instead circumstances arose, as he explained in your interview, that sent him packing. Hopefully, now that he's once more doing Marvel work, an Iron Man reunion, however brief, might again be a possibility.

My only complaint about your interview is it seemed much too brief. I guess the currently perceived attention span is about ten or fifteen minutes, but I'd like to read some longer, more in depth interviews, even if you have to break them up over several issues as you've done. Or couldn't you issue specials more often than every 25th issue? You always have a nice selection of creators, but occasionally, as with Gene this issue, I wish we could've gone into more detail.

— Joe Frank
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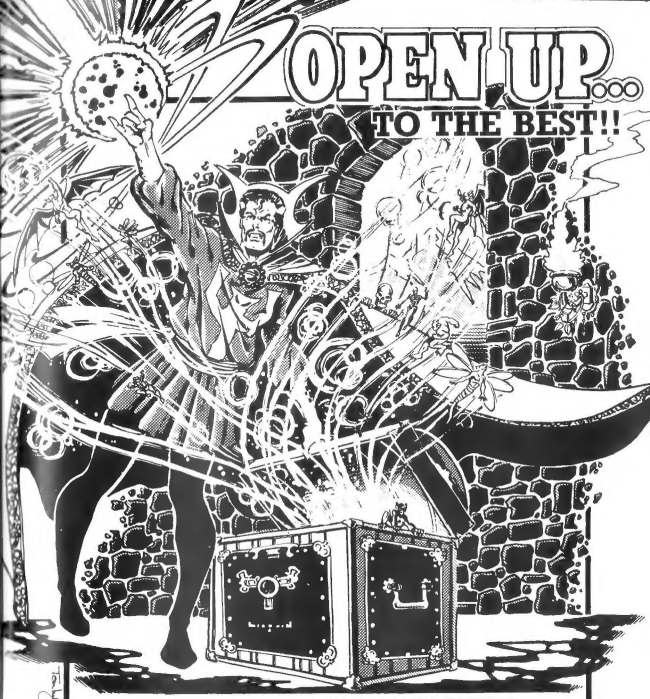

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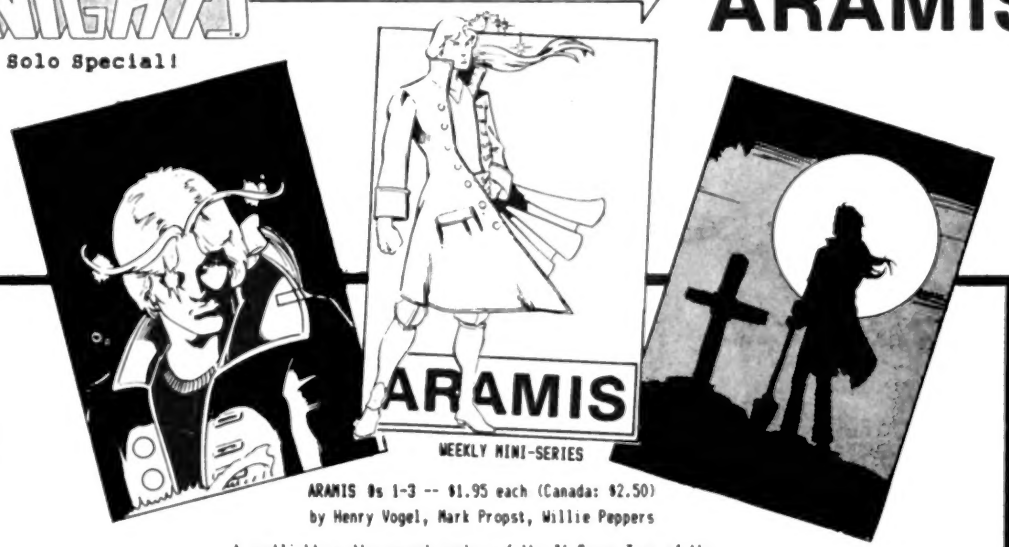

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